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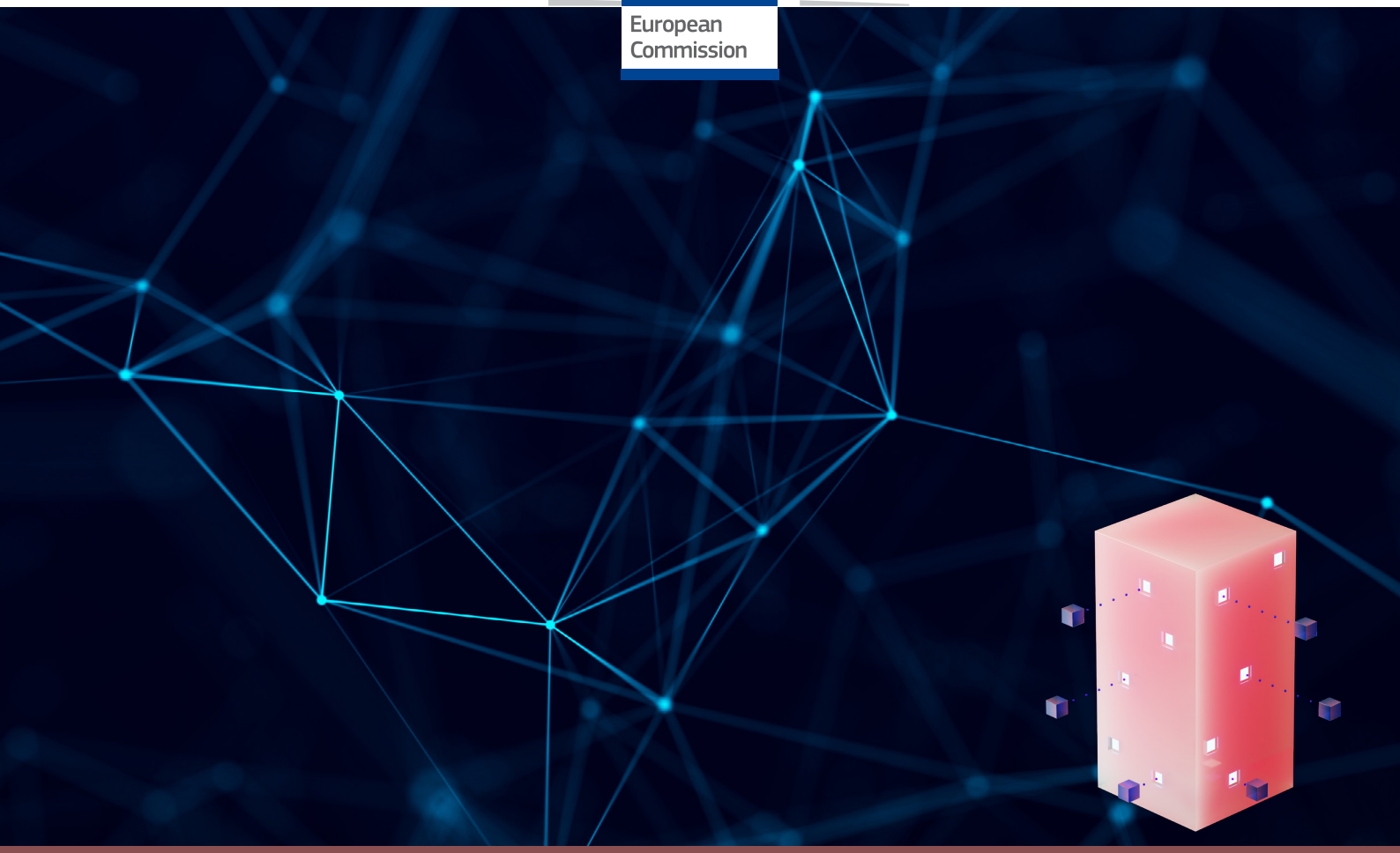

Cooperation **guidelines** for a seamless digitalization support to **European SME**

enterprise europe network

EDIH European Digital Innovation Hubs Network

DTA Digital Transformation Accelerator

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Table of contents

Table of contents 3
Executive Summary 5
Introduction 1
1 Test before invest 3
1.1 EDIH Service Offer 3
1.2 EEN Service Offer 7
1.3 Cluster Service Offer 7
1.4 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – EEN 8
1.5 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – Clusters 9
2 Skills and Training 12
2.1 EDIH Service Offer 12
2.2 EEN Service Offer 13
2.3 Cluster Service Offer 13
2.4 Integrated client Journey 14
2.5 Opportunities for successful cross-networks cooperation 16
3 Support to find investment 20
3.1 EDIH Service Offer 20
3.2 EEN Service Offer 21
3.3 Cluster Service Offer 22
3.4 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – EEN – Clusters 23
3.4.1 Coordination of the cross-network collaboration 23
3.4.2 Cooperation on services 23
3.4.3 Integrated Client Journey 24
3.4.4 Practical recommendations for services 26
4 Innovation Ecosystem and Networking 28
4.1 EDIH Service Offer 28
4.2 EEN Service Offer 30
4.3 Cluster Service Offer 31
4.4 Entry Points and good practices for successful collaboration 32
4.4.1 One client, different journeys: modelling shared approach to support SMEs and PSOs across Networks 33
4.4.2 EDIH – EEN entry points 33
4.4.3 EDIH-Clusters entry points 34
4.5 Opportunities for Successful cooperation between the Networks 34
4.5.1 EDIH – EEN 34

4.5.2 Joint EDIH-EEN cross-border events, including brokerage/matchmaking and innovation challenges 35
4.5.3 EDIH – Clusters 38
4.5.4 Focus areas for an increased cooperation among the Networks 38
Conclusion 40
Acknowledgments 42
Annexes 44
Annex I - Guidance for the Cooperation between the European Digital Innovation Hubs, Enterprise Europe Network Partners, Startup Europe Members and Cluster Organisations 44
Annex II – Template MoU between EEN, Cluster Organisations and EDIH 47

Table of Figures:

Figure 1 Client journey in the area "Test before Invest" between EDIHs and EEN 9
Figure 2 Linking EDIHs and Clusters through the value chain 10
Figure 3 Client Journey 15
Figure 4: Overview of the integrated Client Journey 25
Figure 5 Client journey overview for innovation ecosystem and networking 33

Box 1 Template Agenda for SME Workshop 19
Box 2 An example of cooperation between EDIH and EEN 26
Box 3 Examples of cooperation between EDIH and cluster organisations 27
Box 4 A practical example of collaboration between the Networks from ACCIÓ 31
Box 5 EDIH - EEN cross-border cooperation examples 34
Box 6 A succesfull Matchmaking - Arthur Holm 36
Box 7 EEN-EDIH Client Journey in Innovation Ecosystem and Networking - a practical examples 38

Table 1 Overview of existing Access to Finance services in each network 20

Executive Summary

Digitalization of European Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Public Service Organizations (PSOs) is at the core of the Digital Decade policy programme established with the decision of the European Parliament and the Council in December 2022, and the European Commission has implemented a wide range of measures to ensure that the ambitious target of the Digital Decade policy programme as set by Article 4 – Digital Targets of the Decision is reached by 2030.
To do this, it is very important that the networks supported by the European Commission - such as the European Digital Innovation Hubs, the Enterprise Europe Network and the Cluster organizations - cooperate to ensure a seamless, effective and impact-oriented support to SMEs and PSOs across Europe.

This document wants to support EDIHs, EEN and Clusters to identify possible cooperation opportunities already existing between these networks at European level, and provides practical guidance on how to implement such cooperation at local level. The present Guidelines are intended to serve this role by providing a hands-on, practical approach by design, thanks to the work of the large group of contributors representing the three different networks (EDIHs, EEN and Clusters) in the development of this document.

In this document, the four main service areas of the EDIHs (Test before Invest; Skills and Training; Support to find Investment; Innovation Ecosystem and Networking) are considered. For each of them, the document identifies existing network-specific offerings in the area, and then proceeds with the description of the most promising opportunities for collaboration between the networks and how to implement them locally.
Whether in co-organizing joint matchmaking events, signposting to specific networks' services or identifying specific cooperation paths, each of the four sections of the document provides practical strategies and references on how to develop an integrated client journey across the networks for SMEs at local level.

The document is intended to be a useful guidance not only for yet-to-be-established partnerships between EDIHs, EEN and clusters at local level, but also to improve and further develop cooperation opportunities already in place in more advanced local innovation ecosystems, where these networks already cooperate to some degree.

While this document already provides actionable guidelines to support the creation of an integrated client journey and ultimately unlock the value of the services for the client SMEs, the goal is to expand and complement it with new, impactful cooperation models rising from the different networks locally, as the joint services mature.
.

Introduction

Digital technology and infrastructure have a critical role in our private lives and business environments. We rely on them to communicate, work, advance science and answer current environmental problems. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted not only how much we rely on our technology to be available to us, but also how important it is for Europe not to be dependent on systems and solutions coming from other regions of the world.
The European Union has ambitious targets when it comes to digitalizing its society. The Digital Decade policy programme 2030 sets up common objectives and targets at European level. Among these objectives, the Commission focuses also on the digital transformation of businesses: 75% of EU companies using Cloud, AI, or Big Data, grow scale-ups in the digital sector, and more than 90% of SMEs reach at least a basic level of digital intensity.
Therefore, the European Commission has made available several funding programmes to support the digitalization of companies. The Digital Europe Programme will provide strategic funding to answer these challenges, supporting projects in five key capacity areas: in supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills, and ensuring a wide use of digital technologies across the economy and society, including through Digital Innovation Hubs. The Digital Europe Programme will not address these challenges in isolation, but rather complement the funding available through other EU programmes, such as the Horizon Europe programme, the Single Market Programme, the Connecting Europe Facility for digital infrastructure, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Structural funds, to name a few.

Main support actors for the digitalization of European SMEs

European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH)

A European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) is a support facility that empowers companies to become more competitive by supporting their digital transformation. EDIHs help small and medium-sized companies, mid-caps, and public sector organisations respond to digital challenges. EDIHs provide access to technical expertise and testing ("test before invest") as well as innovation services, such as financial advice, training, and skills development. They also support companies in tackling environmental issues using digital technologies for sustainability and circularity

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

The EEN as the world's largest support network for SMEs with more than 450 partner organisations has a unique outreach to businesses in over 40 countries worldwide. The main target groups of the EEN are SMEs with a potential for international growth and innovative start-ups and scale-ups. Embedded in their regional/national business and innovation support ecosystems, the EEN partners offer their services also to other ecosystem actors such as clusters' members, research and technology organisations and universities. Within its innovation services, EEN partners support transnational technology transfer, as well as innovation management capacity building including also a specialised service focusing on digital innovation audit.

Industrial clusters

Europe's roughly 3000 clusters are major actors of the industrial ecosystems. They connect enterprises, especially SMEs to academia, governments and citizens at different levels of government. The major goal of clusters is to boost their collaboration, support their innovation take-up, internationalisation, resilience and scaling-up. Clusters are key to transnational partnerships to help SMEs access global value chains and build bridges across ecosystems and they are therefore important change agents for the digital transformation. Clusters have the tools to connect supply and demand of digital skills and boost businesses collaboration for supporting investments for digital technology adoption and improve businesses productivity. Clusters encourage knowledge transfer between applied research institutions and enterprises.

Context of the collaboration

The EDIHs are planned to become the orchestrators of the European digital ecosystem and the EEN partners and the cluster organisations are to be an essential part of it due to their vast knowledge in the diversified business environment. For example, the EDIHs and ICT clusters will equally provide innovation services, including financing advice, training and skill development that businesses need for a successful digital transformation.
In order to encourage a structured exchange among the EDIHs, EEN partners and cluster organisations, a Joint Coordination Group with equal number of representatives of EDIHs, EEN partners and clusters has been launched at European level by the European Commission in February 2023. This Group prepared the following cooperation guidelines with different recommended actions to be implemented jointly by their members at regional/national level. The Group will hold two annual meetings which will be used to monitor and plan joint actions, as well as to maintain a platform to exchange good practices of regional/national EDIH-EEN-cluster cooperation.

1 Test before invest

In today's competitive business landscape, organisations are increasingly seeking ways to reduce risk and maximise return on investment. One such approach is the utilisation of test before invest services, which provide businesses with valuable insights and support in their **decision-making processes**. With the aim of minimising risks and maximising returns, European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs), clusters, and the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) facilitate **pre-investment testing processes** that help businesses assess the feasibility and potential of their proposed ventures.

The "Test-before-Invest" principle is a precious tool for individuals and organisations across various industries. It enables them to **experiment** with new ideas, strategies, process management or products in a controlled and limited environment before making larger-scale investments. This **risk mitigation approach** can lead to better decision-making, more efficient use of resources, and ultimately more tremendous success.

One key aspect of the "Test-before-Invest" principle is identifying potential issues or pitfalls early. Experimenting with an idea/process in a smaller setting makes it easier to pinpoint areas that need improvement or adjustments. This can lead to a process of refining the concept, reducing the likelihood of encountering major problems after significant resources have been allocated.

Moreover, applying this principle allows stakeholders to gather **valuable data and insights** on how their concept would perform in the real world. By analysing feedback and results from initial testing processes, organisations can identify if their proposal has sufficient potential for success before further investment.

1.1 EDIH Service Offer

Among the services offered by EDIHs, one of the key offerings is "test before invest," which ensures businesses can validate their digital solutions before making a substantial investment.

The test before invest service comprises several key components: 1) Digital Maturity Assessment; 2) Technical Assessment; 3) Feasibility Studies; 4) Rapid Prototyping; 5) Access to Experts; 6) Financial Advise; 7) Networking and opportunities.

1) **Digital maturity assessment** refers to the processes, tools, and methodologies used by EDIHs to evaluate the level of digital transformation and readiness of an organization or a specific sector. The idea is to understand where an entity stands in its digital transformation journey and how it can leverage technologies and services to move forward. Digital maturity assessment (DMA) includes but is not limited to:
    - **Assessment of Current State**: Understand the current technological infrastructure, digital skills of employees, and the extent of digitization of processes.
    - **Benchmarking**: Compare the assessed state to industry best practices, or to similar organizations, to understand where gaps and opportunities lie.

- **Identification of Opportunities**: Based on the assessment, pinpoint areas where digital technologies can bring the most value, or where there is an immediate need for digital upskilling or infrastructure upgrades.
- **Recommendations**: Suggest specific tools, technologies, processes, or training that can help the entity progress in its digital transformation journey.
- **Roadmap Development**: Create a step-by-step guide or plan on how to achieve the digital objectives set out in the recommendations.
- **Implementation and Monitoring**: After the assessment and roadmap creation, the next steps involve implementing the recommended actions and continuously monitoring progress to adjust strategies as needed.

The benefits of DMA for participating organisations are clear. By taking a comprehensive approach to technical assessment, organisations can:

- Make informed decisions about which solutions to pursue;
- Avoid costly mistakes and rework by spotting potential problems early on;
- Ensure that their digital transformation aligns with their strategic goals and existing technical landscape.

2) **Technical assessment**: EDIHs provide a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed solution, analyzing its technical requirements and compatibility with existing systems. This enables organizations to identify potential bottlenecks and challenges early in the innovation process. This assessment aims to evaluate how the solution fits into the existing technological landscape and whether it meets specified criteria and standards. Evaluation could consist of the different stages which include, but not limited to:
   - Evaluation of Technical Requirements
   - Functional Specifications
   - Infrastructure Evaluation
   - Security Analysis
   - Scalability and Performance
   - Compatibility with Existing Systems
   - Data Migration
   - User Experience (UX)
   - Identification of Potential Bottlenecks and Challenges
   - Technical Debt
   - Maintenance and Support
   - Customization
   - Cost Implications

   The technical assessment conducted by EDIHs ensures that organizations are not just adopting innovations in a vacuum but are making choices that will seamlessly integrate and add value to their existing operations.

3) **Feasibility studies**: The hubs carry out feasibility studies for the SMEs to assess whether a particular solution would be effective in the target market. This includes analyzing market demand, competitor analysis, and identifying key success factors, among others. By conducting comprehensive feasibility studies, the EDIH's aim to ensure that the

initiatives they support or implement have a solid foundation and a high probability of success in the target market.

4) **Rapid prototyping:** As part of the test before invest service, EDIHs offer rapid prototyping capabilities, allowing organizations to create functional prototypes of their digital solutions quickly and cost-effectively. This can help businesses refine their products and identify potential issues early in the development process.
   Rapid prototyping refers to the expeditious development of a comprehensive model representing a product or system in its entirety. The primary objective of rapid prototyping is to visually and experimentally demonstrate the design, functionality, and usability of a product prior to committing resources to its comprehensive manufacture or development. It facilitates the timely identification of design defects or usability difficulties that may provide challenges in the future. Prototyping includes but not limited to
   - Functional Prototypes;
   - Cost-Efficiency
   - Quick Turnaround
   - Feedback Loop
   - Identification of Flaws
   - Reduced Risk

   By offering a test-before-invest service, EDIHs significantly reduce the risk associated with digital innovations. Businesses can feel more secure in their investments after having seen a prototype in action and having addressed potential concerns.

5) **Access to experts:** Through the test before invest service, businesses can tap into a network of specialists with extensive experience in different areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and data analytics. These experts can provide valuable guidance throughout the testing process, ensuring that organizations have access to the necessary knowledge for informed decision-making. One of the primary benefits of such a service is the ability to consult with experts in relevant fields. These experts have likely faced challenges, solved problems, and have a deep understanding of the nuances of their domains.
   Benefits of accessing the experts include:
   - Specialized Knowledge: Experts bring a wealth of knowledge from their particular field, providing insights that might not be obvious to those who don't specialize in that area.
   - Risk Reduction: By consulting with experts, businesses can avoid common pitfalls or challenges, thereby reducing the risk of failed investments.
   - Efficiency: With guidance from experts, the testing process can be more streamlined. They can point out what to prioritize, which tools or methods to use, and how to interpret results.
   - Cost Savings: Although there might be costs associated with consulting experts, in the long run, the insights and advice they provide can lead to substantial cost savings. This is especially true if their guidance prevents costly mistakes or directs the company towards more profitable opportunities.

- Network Expansion: Collaborating with experts can expand a company's professional network. This can lead to further opportunities for partnerships, collaborations, or even future consultations.

In summary, the overarching benefit of this service, coupled with access to experts, is that businesses are better equipped to make informed decisions. With a clearer understanding of the potential challenges, risks, and rewards, businesses can confidently invest in new ventures, technologies, or strategies. The "Test Before Invest" service, when complemented by access to experts, offers businesses a unique opportunity to validate their ideas and strategies while minimizing risks. In domains such as AI, cybersecurity, and data analytics, where the landscape is intricate and continually evolving, expert guidance becomes invaluable.

6) **Financial advice**: EDIHs can also provide financial advice tailored to each project's unique needs. This can help organizations better understand funding options and grant opportunities that may be available to support their digital initiatives. Financial Advice from EDIHs include but not limited to:
   - Tailored Consultation
   - Understanding Funding Options
   - Grant Opportunities
   - Alternative Financing
   - Financial Planning and Strategy
   - Networking with Financial Institutions

   By providing tailored financial advice, EDIHs play a crucial role in enabling the digital transformation of organizations across Europe. They help organisations navigate the financial landscape, support to scout funding opportunities and guide organizations to ensure the successful realization of their digital initiatives through the “test before invest”.

7) **Networking opportunities:** The test before invest service connects organizations with other businesses that have gone through similar challenges or are currently working on complementary products or services. This collaboration fosters valuable knowledge sharing and strengthens strategic partnerships within the business ecosystem. Networking opportunities for the test before invest include, but not limited to:
   - Connect organizations with similar challenges or complementary products/services for the test before invest: through their vast network, can match businesses that are facing similar digital transformation challenges or are in similar sectors. They can also connect businesses that are working on products or services that can complement each other. This matchmaking fosters collaboration and co-innovation.
   - Knowledge sharing and strengthening strategic partnerships: By connecting organizations with others that have undergone similar challenges or are working on complementary solutions, there is a ripe environment for exchanging ideas, best practices, and lessons learned. Organizations can learn from each other's mistakes and successes, potentially accelerating their own innovation processes. Furthermore, these connections might evolve into long-term strategic partnerships

where businesses collaborate on joint ventures, share resources, or co-develop new solutions.

- Business Ecosystem: This refers to the interconnected nature of businesses, suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders in a particular market or sector. An ecosystem perspective recognizes that businesses don't operate in isolation. Instead, they are part of a larger web of relationships and interactions that can influence their success. By networking and forming strategic partnerships, businesses can better navigate and thrive within this ecosystem.

1.2 EEN Service Offer

EEN is a mature Innovation Ecosystem on its own and well linked with various ecosystems globally. EEN partners usually are very well connected to all relevant stakeholders in their regions and have close working relations with regional clusters. Since both clusters and EDIHs have this regional dimension at their core, it is very important to identify the responsible EEN office in their regions to maximise the services offered to SMEs and Public Service Organisations (PSOs) in the territory. Also, more than 50% of the existing EDIHs as of November 2023 have partners which are also involved in existing EEN consortia to some degree. Thus, relationships between the networks can be established often in a easy way.
EEN works with regional clusters to connect with the entrepreneurial ecosystem of their regions. EEN benefits from the specialisation of these clusters as they work closely in their realm to support SMEs with targeted added-value services and international activities. Currently, clusters disseminate EEN events or services as well as contribute to the organisation of events together with the EEN partners.
EEN can complement on the existing services offered by EDIHs and clusters by bringing its own added value in the “Test before Invest” area:

- **Information and assistance** by organising seminars, workshops and webinars on technologies, best practices, and related funding opportunities to increase the awareness and to facilitate the adoption.
- **Personalised assistance** by providing technology audits and check-ups for aiding businesses to embrace digital tools and strategies, develop digital skill and partnerships.
- **Matching** by organising brokerage events and company missions with a sectoral focus or horizontal theme addressing companies, universities, research centres and stakeholders to facilitate connections, partnerships, and cross-border collaboration.
- **Technology, and R&D Partnering** by creating international profiles for facilitating collaborations among businesses and suitable partners for technology, research and development needs

1.3 Cluster Service Offer

From clusters’ perspective, "Test before Invest" means providing potential customers or members with an opportunity to try out a service or product before they commit to a significant investment. In this context, the following type of services can be identified as complementary to the offers of EDIHs and EEN:

1) **Demo platforms**:

- A centralized platform where members can try out different tools, technologies, or services.
- For software implementation, this could mean limited-feature versions or time-limited trials.

2) **Shared infrastructure and resources**: shared workspaces, labs, or facilities where members can conduct experiments, tests, or pilot projects without fully investing in infrastructure. For example, a shared data center for IT businesses to test server loads.
3) **Training and workshops**:
   - Short courses or training sessions that allow members to explore new skills or technologies without committing to full-length courses.
   - Hands-on workshops that provide practical experience before investment.
4) **Consultation services**:
   - Expert consultants who can guide members on potential investments.
   - Feasibility studies for specific projects.
5) **Market testing**:
   - Platforms or opportunities for members to test their products or services in real market conditions but at a limited scale.
   - Focus group sessions, survey services, or pilot launch events.
6) **Networking events**: regular events where members can meet potential partners, customers, or investors, testing the waters for possible collaborations or deals.
7) **Collaborative projects**: platforms where members can collaborate on joint projects, allowing them to test synergy and compatibility before entering larger ventures.
8) **Shared research and development**: joint R&D initiatives where members can test out new technologies or methodologies without bearing the full cost individually.
9) **Feedback and review platforms**: platforms where members can share and receive feedback on their products, services, or ideas.
10) **Financial assessment services**:
    - Financial experts who can assist members in evaluating the potential ROI of an investment.
    - Risk assessment and management services.
11) **Shared marketing and promotion**: joint marketing campaigns or events where members can gauge the effectiveness of promotional methods before fully investing.
12) **Regulatory and compliance testing**: services that help members test their products or services against regulatory standards or obtain necessary certifications without going through the full process.
13) **Prototype development**:hared facilities or tools for creating and testing prototypes, allowing members to evaluate the viability of a product before full-scale production.

1.4 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – EEN

The **collaboration** between the **EEN** and **EDIHs** is seen as win-win cooperation that reinforces service offerings by seamlessly merge the capabilities of EEN and EDIHs in the following **strategic activities** that:

- **Common Trainings, Workshops, and Info-Days**: co-create events and dedicated workshops on digital technologies and their application in specific sectors to increase awareness and educate businesses about the transformative potential of digital

technologies, offer insights into real-world applications, showcasing success stories and best practices.

- **Joint Digital Scans, Audits, Assessments, and Action Plans**: jointly carry out detailed assessments with local/regional EDIHs to offer comprehensive insights and recommendations to identify SMEs' digital transformation needs. Utilise digital audits to craft action plans integrating EDIH service offerings.
- **Joint Matching related Events**: offer SMEs access to potential partners, funding sources, connection with technology providers, and investors.
- **Referrals of SMEs**: strengthen outreach efforts by referring SMEs to relevant regional/national members within the EDIH network. Facilitate connections by exchanging cooperation profiles, opening avenues for digital technology partnerships and fostering cross-border collaborations to enhance internationalisation.
- **Joint Promotion of Services**: organise information days that highlight the seamless integration of services from both EDIHs and EEN by emphasising the benefits of accessing a comprehensive suite of support.

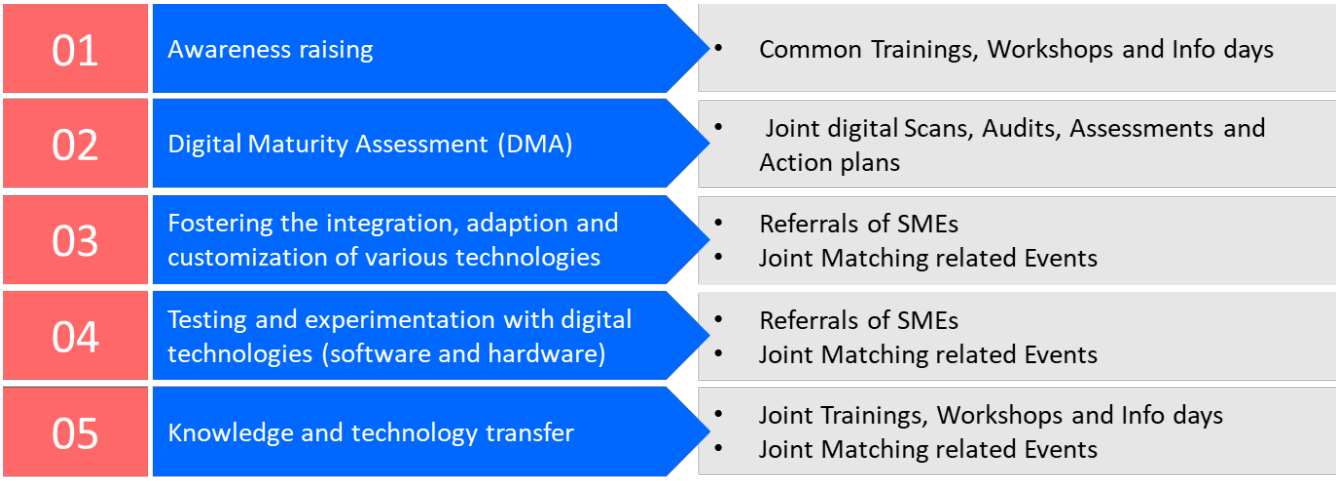


Figure 1 Client journey in the area "Test before Invest" between EDIHs and EEN

1.5 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – Clusters

From the non-exhaustive list of services detailed in the previous sections, it is evident that both clusters and EDIHs can provide a wide range of added-value services in the broader "Test before Invest" field. These potential cooperations include, but not limited to:

- **Centralized platforms for demos and trials**: Clusters could utilize the infrastructure and technical capabilities of EDIHs to offer their members a centralized platform where they can demo or trial various technologies, tools or services. This would ensure that cluster members have access to the latest digital solutions tailored to their needs.
- **Shared infrastructure and resources**: Clusters and EDIHs can collaborate to offer shared workspaces, labs, or other facilities. For example, a cluster focusing on IT could benefit from EDIHs' expertise by setting up a shared data center or rapid prototyping facility.
- **Joint training and workshops**: EDIHs, with their vast network of experts, can offer specialized training sessions and workshops to cluster members. This collaboration ensures that training is relevant, hands-on, and in line with the latest industry standards.

- **Consultation and feasibility studies**: Cluster members could directly benefit from the consultation services of EDIHs. Expert consultants from EDIHs can provide insights into potential investments, collaborate on feasibility studies, and offer specialized advice tailored to cluster members' specific projects.
- **Market testing and networking events**: Clusters can collaborate with EDIHs to organize networking events, where cluster members can test their products or services in real market conditions and gain valuable feedback. Such collaborations would also foster knowledge exchange and the formation of strategic partnerships.
- **Collaborative R&D and prototyping**: Joint R&D&I initiatives can be set up, allowing members from both clusters and EDIHs to collaborate on innovative projects. EDIHs, with their rapid prototyping capabilities, can help cluster members in creating and testing prototypes more effectively.
- **Feedback, review and financial assessment platforms**: EDIHs can provide platforms where cluster members can share and receive feedback on their products or services. Additionally, financial experts from EDIHs can offer valuable insights into the potential ROI of an investment for cluster members.
- **Shared marketing, regulatory testing and promotion**: Clusters and EDIHs can engage in joint marketing campaigns, promoting the achievements and services of both. Additionally, EDIHs can assist clusters in testing products against regulatory standards.
- **Connecting experts with SMEs**: EDIHs can bridge the gap between clusters and the expert community. By offering a platform where SMEs can directly connect with professionals in areas such as AI, cybersecurity, and data analytics, clusters can ensure that their members receive the best guidance.
- **Strengthening the European business ecosystem**: By working together, clusters and EDIHs can strengthen the European business ecosystem, fostering a collaborative environment where businesses can innovate, validate, and grow together.

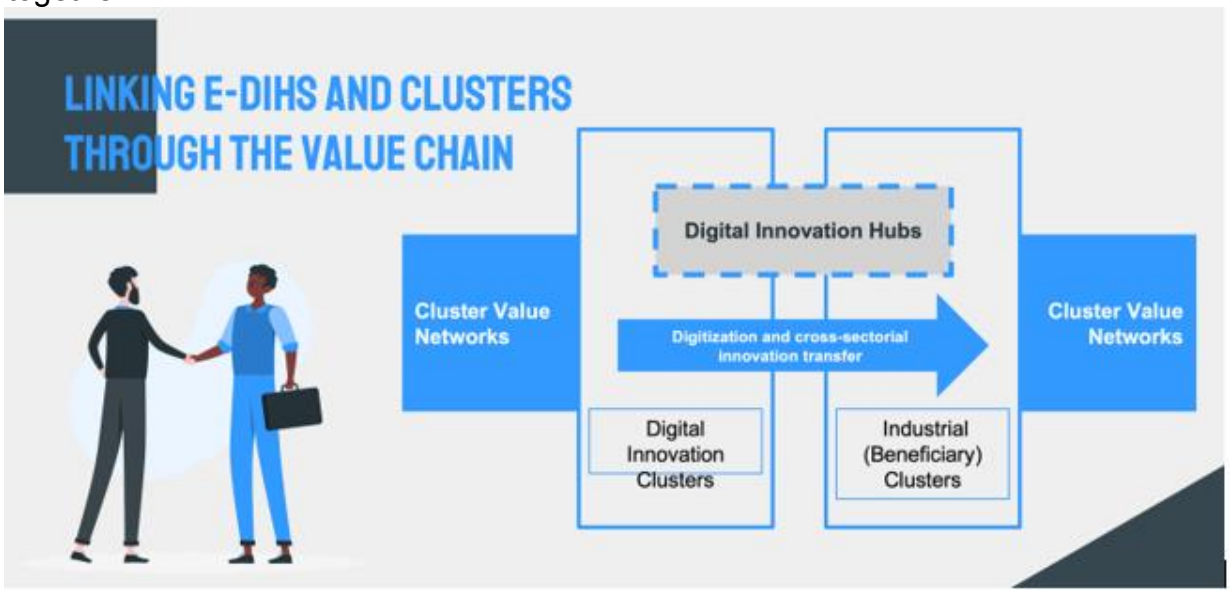


Figure 2 Linking EDIHs and Clusters through the value chain

In conclusion, the cooperation between clusters and EDIHs in the realm of "Test before Invest" offers a synergistic approach to fostering innovation, reducing risks, and promoting

growth for businesses, especially SMEs, across Europe. Combining the strengths and resources of both networks ensures that businesses have access to a comprehensive suite of services, expertise, and infrastructure, enabling them to navigate the complex landscape of digital transformation with confidence.

2 Skills and Training

Empowering European workforce with advanced skills and adequate trainings to fully benefit from the digital transformation of the economy is of one of the key areas of action of the EDIHs, EEN and Cluster Networks. As highlighted in this Section, each of these networks have their own strengths and focus area: the intelligent cooperation of these networks in workforce upskilling and training is key to tackle the Digital Decade challenges.
Adoption of digital technologies can in fact have side effects as job displacements or new types of jobs for emerging technologies. As part of their service offer, EDIHs will develop and offer training activities, , adapted to SMEs' evolving needs and workforce upskilling. Training will cover also business and new market opportunities on advanced technologies. EEN Network can leverage on decade-long experience in training and coaching SMEs on specific areas such as internationalization, access to finance and digitalization. Clusters can, on the other hand, offer specialized services that can complement the services available in the other two networks on sector-specific basis.

2.1 EDIH Service Offer

Business training focused on transversal capabilities for attaining digitalisation:

Executives trainings for disruptive technologies

Training in digital technologies is a key tool for executives and managers to keep up to date in today's world and to be able to make the most of the opportunities offered by the digital era. In the digital sphere, it is increasingly essential to have knowledge of different technological areas, such as Machine Learning, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), Big Data, HPC etc. to be able to take advantage of the benefits that these technologies offer.

Executive trainings for implementation of digitalisation technologies in industries

- Business processes and technology-specific executive training on
  - Big Data Implementation
  - of AI Implementation
  - Strategy for automation in SMEs
  - Connectivity technologies and implementation of industrial IoT
  - Smart Logistics and distribution
  - Data economics and data driven culture.
- Funding opportunities and capacities from digitalisation (covering business & entrepreneurship)
- Training on financing opportunities is a key tool to boost the growth and development of a business. Through this training, entrepreneurs can learn how to identify and take advantage of different public and private financing options, both nationally and internationally.

Technology training covers general topics and upskilling sessions

- Digital upskilling to workers in industry 4.0 and digitalisation.

- In-house training activities, sector-focused, adapted to SMEs' evolving needs and workforce upskilling.
- Specific technology courses designed to cover the ICT demand towards digitalisation of the ecosystem (e.g., cybersecurity, machine learning for image, video, audio analysis, 3D printing and applications, etc.)

2.2 EEN Service Offer

EEN network already offers a range of collective and individual services aimed at upskilling SMEs' workforce, mainly targeted on EU Single Market and innovation support:

- Individual support will take the form of advisory services on EU regulation on data protection and IoT, partnership building, innovation management
- Collective support through training and coaching sessions are regularly organised on the same subjects

On the subject of digitalisation, EEN network is providing services such as:

- Entry level assessments to help SMEs define their digital maturity level in order to elaborate an action plan
- Support to SMEs in the elaboration of cooperation profiles in order to find synergies with solution providers in Europe

Within the EEN Network, some partners have already complemented their training offer with the ones available in selected EDIHs. It is envisaged that this already existing cooperation – which is now ad-hoc and facilitated by the participation of EEN members in EDIH consortium across Europe[1] - will be further expanded in a more systematic way.

2.3 Cluster Service Offer

At the core of the clusters' mission lies the fundamental recognition that capacity building is a critical driver of success for SMEs. Clusters are very close to the needs of the companies in the geographic region they cover and in the fields in which they operate, and are therefore best positioned to offer courses for the companies they represent and to engage them in the training offer available in EDIH and EEN Networks.

Clusters prioritize high-quality training opportunities, offering a range of both open access and fee-based courses. Leveraging on their expertise in local industries, clusters customize training to meet SMEs' and cluster managers needs, ensuring maximum impact and competitiveness.

Clusters already offer a range of sector specific technical courses as well as more general soft skills trainings. Some of these trainings were already implemented in practice through Digital Innovation Hubs and could be quickly scaled up and adapted for EDIHs purposes and pooled with the training offerings of the other networks. Some courses are already available for EDIHs to access through the EDIH Network training section. Other potential trainings that can be pooled are the ones provided by Automotive Skills Alliance, courses provided through EU Structural and Investment funds, through ERASMUS and other projects[2].

[1] According to DTA internal analysis, it is estimated that about 50% of the EDIHs are already cooperating with EEN, since they have at least one EEN Partner organisation in their consortium.

[2] See for instance Innovative Digital Transilvania 4.0, Flamenco Project, INTRIDE TFC -

Aside from this specific, sector-focused trainings, Clusters are also in the position to offer executive and business trainings in a range of areas such as:

- Innovation Management: through Eurocluster[3] the Innovation Management aims to train a culture of creativity and guides SMEs in idea generation, prototyping, and bringing innovations to market.
- Digital Transformation: Learn to adapt to digital technologies, integrate tools, and use data analytics for better decision-making.
- Organizational Transformation: Navigate change effectively with leadership, communication, and workforce readiness strategies.
- Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship: Develop entrepreneurial skills for starting ventures or driving innovation within your organization.
- Tech Transfer and R&D Management: Stay tech-savvy with insights on technology transfer, R&D project management, funding, and IP.
- Digital Platforms: Maximize your reach and engagement through social media, e-commerce, and online marketplaces.
- Ethics in the Digital Age: Make ethical decisions, manage data privacy, and practice responsible digital behaviour.
- Predictive Maintenance: Reduce downtime by predicting equipment failures and optimizing maintenance schedules.
- Digital Business Models: Embrace digital business models like e-commerce, subscriptions, and data-driven improvements to stay competitive.

Furthermore, by operating across the quadruple helix, clusters can also quickly involve academic actors to deploy specific trainings on technology transfer, industrial and research ecosystem development, R&D management, strategic analysis and development, intellectual property management, factory automation, digital technologies (AI, Cloud, Data Science, IoT, Cybersecurity, Digital Twin & Simulation), data-driven organisation and management, Industry 4.0.

2.4 Integrated client Journey

Figure 3 below offer an overview of a potential client journey for a company looking to boost its digitalisation readiness and to upskill its workforce. The Figure highlights the strengths of each network in terms of skills and trainings and map them across the maturity level of the services – from early diagnostic to market uptak

[3] https://clustercollaboration.eu/euroclusters ss

Figure 3 Client Journey

2.5 Opportunities for successful cross-networks cooperation

Trans-network collaboration between European Digital Innovation Hub, Enterprise Europe Network and Cluster in the skills and training area needs to be fluent, so it is important to consider several common activities and events, along with periodic meetings to plan actions and to monitor these. Also, each network will showcase the opportunities and elements of the other networks in its own community. This collaboration will be key for the SMEs pathway towards digitalization, foster digital innovation and enhance technology adoption: their complementary work will allow the redirection of SMEs to the correct network based on the SME needs.

In order to identify specific opportunities for successful cross-networks cooperation in the skills and training area, the non-exhaustive example of EDIH-EEN-Clusters client journey in Figure 3 has been defined and considered. In this client journey three stages have been considered to the market reach of the new services and products based on digitalization from the SMEs.

The complementarity between the networks in these three stages has been established in the client journey highlighting the specialized services of each network and indicating with orange ellipses those services directly related to skills and training area.

Given the wealth of high-level content already available in the different networks, “Skills and trainings” represent a particularly interesting field of cooperation which can be relatively easily and quickly deployed. The development of cooperation between networks in this area can in fact offer a frictionless entry point for SMEs looking to boost their digitization readiness (trainings have usually lower entry barriers compared to other services and provides immediate return on the investment in terms of actionable knowledge acquired) and can therefore be the ideal area to test successful joint offering among the networks.

To better scope the cooperation in this area, the following activities are envisaged:

- **Mapping of stakeholders** focusing on SME upskilling on digitalisation subjects
  - Define the main stakeholders in the networks, including EDIHs and Clusters.
  - Highlight the significance of identifying stakeholders, such as educational institutions, industry associations, local businesses, governmental bodies, and research institutions.
  - Take into consideration the importance of engaging with tech startups and accelerators, as they often serve as innovation catalysts.
- **Defining a strategy of cooperation between each network** (i.e., formalising a MoU adaptable to each regional context, establishing periodic meetings, signposting mechanism for SMEs between EDIH, EEN and Clusters)
  - Establish a clear strategy for cooperation between EDIH and Clusters. This may involve formalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that is adaptable to each regional context (see also Annex II – Template MoU between EEN, Cluster Organisations and EDIH)
  - Highlight the benefits of strategic alignment, which could include joint projects, funding applications, and shared resources.
- Signposting Mechanism for SMEs:

- Develop a mechanism for seamlessly directing SMEs to relevant resources and services offered by both EDIH and Clusters.
- Explore the potential of creating a web-based platform or a shared directory to facilitate easy access to support, and consider adding an AI-driven recommendation system to personalize assistance for SMEs.

- **Organisation of joint workshops** to inform SME on specific technologies. During the event, networks can explain their services regarding those technologies. To facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing, a standardized workshop template and an agenda can be used (see Box 1 below).
- **EEN account management**: include EDIH as an external spoke in the EEN client journey phase of training in digital technologies and engage them during info days and informative sessions on business and funding opportunities. To include EDIH as an external spoke in the EEN client journey, the following steps are envisaged:
  - Identification of SMEs with digitalization needs: Identify SMEs within the EEN network that could benefit from EDIH services and expertise.
  - Assessment of SME requirements and readiness for digitalization.
  - Referral of SMEs to appropriate EDIH services: Introduce SMEs to the available EDIH services and explain how they complement their digital technology training.
  - Coordination between EEN and EDIH to ensure a seamless client experience: Ensure that the services provided by EDIH align with the specific needs and goals of the SMEs.
  - Integration: Seamlessly integrate EDIH offerings into the training and information sessions provided to SMEs.
  - Regular updates and communication between both networks to track progress.
  - Feedback and Optimization: Gather feedback from SMEs to continually improve the integration process and maximize the benefits.
- **Specific collaboration opportunities EDIH – Clusters**
  - Collaboration between EDIH and Clusters presents a unique opportunity to foster digital innovation, enhance technology adoption, and support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Europe. To facilitate effective collaboration, consider the following strategies and activities:
  - Priority Action: Mapping of Stakeholders Dedicated to SME Upskilling on Digitalization Subjects. Begin by introducing the importance of mapping stakeholders dedicated to SME upskilling on digitalization subjects. Emphasize the value of a collaborative approach between EDIH and Clusters to identify key players in this ecosystem.
  - Organize joint workshops and events aimed at educating SMEs on specific digitalization technologies and strategies.
    - For the setup of such networks, organisers can make sue of the standardized workshop template and agenda (Box 1) for consistency, and consider offering these events in multiple formats, including webinars and interactive online sessions.
  - Information Exchange
  - Account Management Integration

        - Incorporating EDIH into Cluster Client Journey:
        - Outline the steps to include EDIH as an external spoke in the Cluster client journey phase of training in digital technologies.
        - Highlight the potential for creating a mentorship program where experienced SMEs guide those newer to digitalization.
    - Identification and Assessment:
        - Identify SMEs within the Cluster network with digitalization needs.
        - Assess SME requirements and readiness for digitalization, and consider conducting digital maturity assessments to tailor support effectively.
    - Referral to EDIH Services:
        - Introduce SMEs to the available EDIH services and explain how they complement their digital technology training.
        - Consider developing a digital technology roadmap for each SME, connecting them with specific EDIH services according to their needs.
    - Coordination for Seamless Client Experience:
        - Ensure that the services provided by EDIH align with the specific needs and goals of the SMEs in the Cluster network.
        - Explore creating collaborative projects where EDIH and Cluster teams work together to address specific industry challenges.
        - Seamlessly integrate EDIH offerings into the training and information sessions provided to SMEs within the Cluster network.

Example of Joint Workshop Agenda to inform SMEs

- Introduction and Welcome
    - Briefly introduce the purpose and objectives of the workshop.
    - Welcome participants and acknowledge their contributions.
- Overview of Specific Technologies
    - Provide an overview of the specific technologies or topics that will be discussed during the workshop.
    - Offer context on why these technologies are relevant and how they relate to the participants' interests.
- Presentation of Network Services
    - Highlight the services and resources offered by the networks (EDIH, EEN, Clusters) that are relevant to the workshop theme.
    - Emphasize how these services can benefit SMEs and support their digitalization efforts.
- Interactive Discussion and Q&A
    - Encourage active participation from attendees.
    - Facilitate discussions, questions, and sharing of experiences related to the workshop's focus.
    - Invite input and insights from experts or participants with relevant knowledge.
- Networking and Information Exchange
    - Create opportunities for networking and building connections among participants.

- Allow time for participants to exchange contact information and discuss potential collaborations.
- Share contact details of key network representatives for further inquiries.

- Closing Remarks and Next Steps
  - Summarize key takeaways and insights from the workshop.
  - Express appreciation for participants' contributions.
  - Outline next steps, such as follow-up activities, future workshops, or available resources

Box 1 Template Agenda for SME Workshop

3 Support to find investment

Support to find investment is one key area to secure a sustainable implementation of the innovative products and processes developed by SMEs and PSOs thanks to the support of EDIHs. While support to find investment is often a tailor-made process which takes into account a range of different variables, its efficiency can be greatly improved by cooperating with existing networks of private and public investors and on existing expertise in terms of public funding and procuring. This table below summarise the services provided by each network. It shows that the services provided to SMEs by the 3 Networks and related to Access to Finance (A2F) are both similar and complementary.

This means that EEN, EDIHs and Clusters can offer SMEs and PSOs a wide range of qualified services which can be pooled to provide the recipients with best possible solutions for the identified needs. In this case, it is highly recommended a cooperation between the different networks. On the other side of the spectrum, when only one network are in the position to offer a qualified service to the client (say the "assessment of financial needs for digital transformation" service as indicated in the table below), it is recommend to signpost to the relevant Network capable of providing this service.

SME identified needs	EEN	EDIH	Clusters
Advice on A2F	✓	✓	✓
A2F for advanced digitalisation		✓	✓
Assessment of financial needs for digital transformation		✓	
A2F for internationalisation and sustainability	✓		✓
Support to get public and EU funding	✓	✓	✓
Matchmaking with investors	✓	✓	✓
Mentoring programme			✓
Support/advice for pitching	✓	✓	✓

Table 1 Overview of existing Access to Finance services in each network

3.1 EDIH Service Offer

1) Access to programs

- Database of Public Funding Programs. Each EDIH usually curates a database including funding possibilities for SMEs, start-ups and the public sector. The databases usually includes regional, national and European funding calls.
- Consulting for Public Funding Programs and Grants. Organisations get consultation for funding projects in person and via investment guidelines, and also have the option

to be assisted when preparing the application for funding on the national and European level.

2) **Funding area**
   - Venture Days Pitch days/Investor pitch and investor consultation. A large number of EDIHs already offer as part of their portfolio the organisation of venture days with different focuses and target groups. The widest use format is pitch events, during which pre-identified start-ups with digital business ideas present their ideas in front of a parterre of (regional, national or international) investors, venture capitalists and business angels.
3) **Venture Development coaching**
   - As part of their portfolio, EDIHs may also offer venture development coaching, which focus on business model generation and early-stage startups. As part of this service, perspective founders can receive not only financial support from investors, but also expertise and a network. The Venture Development service can also be offered as part of dedicated mentoring sessions and workshops.

3.2 EEN Service Offer

1) **Access to finance advisory**
   - EEN advisors support SMEs to scale up and to access financing. Their role is to analyse the needs of their beneficiaries and to provide them with basic access to finance advisory. EEN advisors are aware of the various opportunities in their respective regions. EEN can advise on both private (equity, debt) and public (European, national or regional) funding.
2) **Support to find private funding**
   - Within the EEN client journey, support to find private investment is key for startups and scaleups. EEN advisors have an extensive knowledge of the local financing ecosystem, and they are able to advise startups and scaleups on the different sources of private funding (business angels, crowd funding, funds, banks, alternative credit etc.)
3) **EU funding - Entry level advice**
   - Many EEN member organisations have Research and Innovation (R&I) funding advisors on board. They can provide with an overview of European R&I funding and first advice and information to SMEs regarding the most suitable funding instruments. EEN usually works closely with the National Contact Points (NCPs).
4) **Business to Investors matchmaking**
   - The EEN's core business in international matchmaking. The Network organises many international matchmaking events. During some of those events, investors participate in order to find innovative startups to invest in. EEN Matchmaking events are also structured on sector-basis, allowing to activate most relevant stakeholders in the (regional) innovation ecosystem to effectively take part in relevant event only.
5) **Pitching and events**
   - Organisation of events where startups can pitch in front of investors. EEN is also involved in international trade fair with a focus on startups looking for investment at different maturity level (ex : Slush, Web Summit, Vivatech etc.)
6) **Client journey involving various stakeholders**

- Close cooperation with stakeholders such as European Business Angel Network (EBAN), European Investment Bank (EIB), European Investment Fund (EIF), National Contact Points (NCPs) Network, Euroquity etc. This ensures a wide coverage of access to finance networks at different level and in different maturity stages.

3.3 Cluster Service Offer

The European clusters have a wide range of activities dedicated to supporting SMEs in finding and secure investments:

1) R&D and Innovation Grants
   - Providing SMEs with resources for Research and Development
   - Encouraging innovation which in turn attracts venture capital and other forms of investment. For instance, the "Cascade Funding" programmes developed by the Euroclusters
2) Mentorship Programs
   - Connecting SMEs with experienced industry leaders, who can in turn offer guidance on investment strategies and decision-making. Reference: C2Lab events organized by the ECCP
3) Access to finance information, advice and guidance
   - Offering continuous information on funding opportunities, financial planning and strategy.
   - Providing insights into potential grants, tax incentives, and other fiscal benefits available for SMEs and investors. Reference: ECCP area on funding opportunities
4) Investment Networking and Matchmaking Events
   - Organizing events in major cities to showcase the innovative products and services of cluster SMEs.
   - Creating investor meet-and-greet sessions, facilitating introductions to venture capitalists, angel investors, and institutional investors. References: Clusters Meet Regions organized by the ECCP, INPHO Venture Summit organized by AlphaRLH
5) Cluster-specific Investment Funds
   - Creation of funds specifically tailored for cluster industries.
   - Simplifying the application and vetting process for SMEs. Reference: Forum Oceano Portugal.
6) Workshops and Training Programs
   - Training on preparing investment proposals and pitches.
   - Workshops on understanding the investment landscape and potential sources of capital.
7) Dedicated Investment Groups and Areas
   - Connecting SMEs with a global network of potential investors.
   - Creation of online platforms where SMEs can showcase their business plans and projects.
8) Online Portals and Resource Centers
   - Developing databases with information and facilitation on calls and funding opportunities.
   - Offering guides, templates, and case studies on successful investment partnerships.

3.4 Opportunities for successful cooperation EDIH – EEN – Clusters

3.4.1 Coordination of the cross-network collaboration

1) **Contact person in each region**. The first step identified to unlock the potential of cooperation among EDIH, EEN and Cluster networks is to appoint a contact person in each region focused on providing services in access to finance. This will facilitate communication between the networks at regional level. It is advisable to select these contact points according to their familiarity with the other networks as well as their expertise on access to finance. The role of the contact points would include dissemination of information such as relevant events or services to their respective networks and brainstorming on how to improve cooperation between the networks.

2) **Joint meetings of the contact points**.
   - Gathering/Sharing: All networks often organise thematic meetings and training on access to finance. In order to optimise the impact of those meetings and trainings it would be useful to invite other networks when relevant. The topics of these meetings could be:
     - Exchanges on best practices in collaboration
     - Training
     - Information sessions
   - Concrete and dynamic agenda: It would be recommended to implement a very concrete agenda on cooperation areas. It is essential to keep this agenda up to date, dynamic and operative. Within this agenda, each network could have a specific focus such as:
     - EDIH: focused on digitisation;
     - EEN: link with sustainability services;
     - Clusters: widespread coverage of stakeholders

     When relevant, additional networks can be invited in order to increase the added value of this agenda. A joint mapping of stakeholders who could help SMEs to Access funding would be very useful for each network.

3.4.2 Cooperation on services

1) Cross-communication on investors/ pitching-events
   - It is essential that information on events with investors and pitching opportunities is shared between the Networks. It should be recommended to join forces, at least at a local level, to organise access to finance events.
2) Organisation of joint annual matchmaking/pitching events
   - EEN and EDIHs have both the organisation of matchmaking events as integral part of their workplan. Most clusters organisation also do. Such matchmaking events often involve topics closely related to access to finance. Every year, it is advisable to have one matchmaking event co-organised by the three networks.

Example:

On the 18th of January 2024, Enterprise Europe Brussels, sustAIn.brussels (Brussels Region's EDIH) and CLAIRE (Confederation of Laboratories for Artificial Intelligence Research in Europe) will organise an international matchmaking event. There will be a strong focus on access to EU funding, and a close cooperation with the local National Contact Points.

3) Support companies in accessing EU Funding Opportunities:
   - The three networks often organise workshops on access to EU funding for their respective beneficiaries. To maximise the impact of such workshops, it can be important to promote them also among the SMEs supported by the other networks. It would add more value to the beneficiaries and facilitate the cross-communication.

Example:

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) organises the C2Labs events (https://clustercollaboration.eu/events/organised-by-eccp/c2lab) open to all interested parties, and dedicated to promote the definition of high quality project proposals, including the facilitation of their access to finance as one of the main event's axis. EDIHs and EEN could contribute in future editions sharing expertise, knowledge and information about their activities, as well as promoting their client's participation in the events.

3.4.3 Integrated Client Journey

The three Networks activities are aimed at a broad target group. Each Network provides appropriate entry points for SMEs and PSOs regardless of their business- and technological maturity level. In terms of access to finance for digitalization (or simply "digitalization"), however, it is very difficult to identify a one-size-fits-all solution, as each client come with its own maturity level and needs. Figure 4: Overview of the integrated Client Journey provides an example of how different services can be offered at different maturity levels. It also suggests how to identify the most suitable network and the most relevant services for different client's needs.

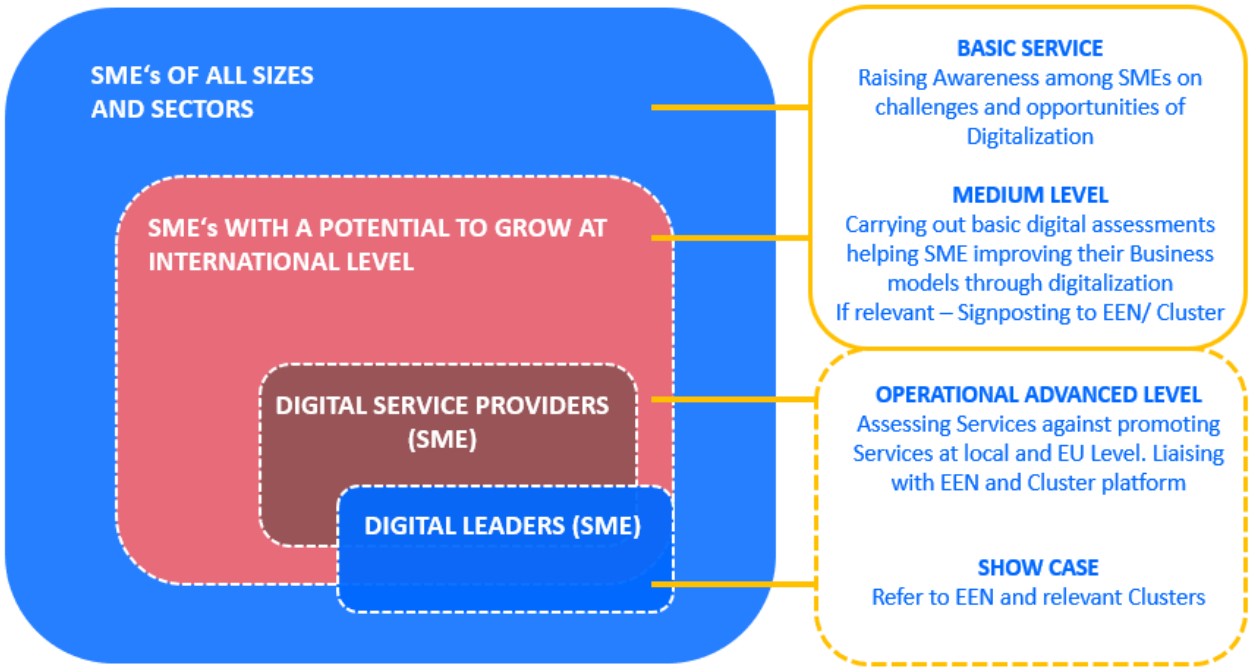


Figure 4: Overview of the integrated Client Journey

1) **Basic services**
   - All SMEs could potentially be reached by the Access to Finance on basic digitalisation services. This includes raising awareness among SMEs on funding opportunities available for digitalisation at international, national and regional level. Providing this basic overview can represent the core of Access to Finance services provided by the three networks. This provides a solid bedrock to start cooperation in terms of awareness raising, leveraging on organisation of joint events, workshops as well as joint publication of information flyers or shared links on webpages.
2) **Medium level**
   - SMEs with a potential to grow and innovate usually have a higher-than-average digital maturity level, and require services tailored accordingly. This includes more specific Access to Finance needs, which in turn requires closer cooperation between the networks, such as signposting to the most relevant network. For instance, EDIHs can be instrumental in providing vertical digital audits or specific evaluation; EEN could provide services for VC matching or start up acceleration; Clusters could in this case act as industry expert for specific A2F on digitalization support and even provide financing opportunities through cascade funding calls as Eurocluster.
3) **Advanced level**
   - ICT technology-based SMEs are not only important target groups of the networks but – if successful – can also become potential service providers helping the digital transform of their peers. For this reason, signposting of such advanced clients can be a successful cooperation activity for the networks. They could also participate in cluster networks activities, benefiting from their shared services and collaborative environment.

Advisors need to gather relevant information to understand well all the potential benefits of integrating means of information and communication technologies into business processes of client companies. The initial assessment, usually performed by the network they first get in touch with, should reveal the openness of a client company to new digital technologies as its digitalisation efforts are predetermined also by its willingness to accommodate them into their business processes. If the first network contacted by client is unable to provide initial assessment, the client can be signposted to EEN advisors that are best positioned to screen the company. Alternatively, EDIHs will have access to a simplified version of the Digital Maturity Assessment in the upcoming months that can be used for this initial screening.
An early entry assessment provided should map client needs and potentials, resulting in a proposed plan which is the fundamental milestone and the primary key for following phases in the Client Journey.

3.4.4 Practical recommendations for services

As mentioned in Section 3.4.3 above, the cooperation between the Networks in Access to Finance starts with a recognition of the client's specific need. Depending on the specific needs of the company and on its maturity level, it can be referred to a EDIH for advanced services, or - in case the services require intense internationalisation activities - the client could be signposted to EEN.

Clusters can, in collaboration with EDIHs and EEN, offer those SMEs interested not only information but also support and guidance in taking advantage of the funding opportunities provided by the EU programmes, facilitating their involvement in international consortia participating in such programmes. Activities as the C2Lab offer those SMEs the opportunity to better define their project ideas, link with the right partners and identify the best funding opportunities available.

In the case that local EDIH or Cluster can fulfil the specific needs of a company, EEN can still offer its Technology or Research/Development Request form. EEN should encourage EDIHs to use the partnering instruments of EEN (such as the Partnering Opportunities Database and Brokerage events) to identify SME needs both at the national and international level.

EDIHs can also leverage on the wide EEN Network to identify specific technology suppliers for specific needs highlighted in the Action Plan resulting from the DMA, if necessary. EEN can facilitate the identification of technology suppliers and support the creation of a Partnership Agreement between the companies.

"French-German Partnering Event for AI in Industry 4.0" – a practical example on cooperation between EDIH and EEN

As a good example for collaborative action between the EEN and DIH network is the annual event "French-German Partnering Event for AI in Industry 4.0" which was supported by EEN and DIH FZI and organised back-to-back with the AIxIA – AI Conference in March 2022. This event enables networking between French and German companies and other stakeholders during 1:1 matchmaking sessions and is also inviting investors to join the matchmaking

Box 2 An example of cooperation between EDIH and EEN

Practical Examples on cooperation between EDIHs and Clusters

There are numerous references of clusters directly involved in the EDIHs, either leading them or as consortium members. As examples, we could mention the Transilvania Digital Innovation Hub, or the AgriFood Lithuania EDIH. In other cases, Clusters not directly related to the EDIHs main focus have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to facilitate collaboration between them, contributing to solve the needs of the SMEs participating in any of both kind of entities. An additional example of MoU can be found in the Aragón EDIH, who signed collaboration with more than 7 external clusters.

The integration of clusters in that collaborative approach allows an agile approach to the client's need, addressing them to the best suited entity.

Box 3 Examples of cooperation between EDIH and cluster organisations

4 Innovation Ecosystem and Networking

4.1 EDIH Service Offer

Innovation Ecosystem and Networking is a key area of activity for EDIHs. While – as for the other networks – there is a number of activities and services that fall under this categorisation, it is possible to group EDIH services into three main areas:

1) Ecosystem & Stakeholder Management
2) Networking & Outreach
3) Brokerage & Matchmaking

The following sections describe in detail a selection of services that can be supplied within these three areas are listed below. This list is intended as an orientation only, and does not want to represent a complete collection of services since, as mentioned, there are a number of different services (and combination of them) which vary depending on a number of different factors, such as the specific EDIH's service portfolio, its main stakeholders, the expertise in its consortium and so on.

Ecosystem & Stakeholder management:

- Organisation of joint events, conferences and fairs:
  - Joint stands and booths can be organized to increase the participation and the presence of the Networks at a larger number of events, to optimize organizational effort for individual partners and to increase attractiveness of stands/booths. The organisation of such type of events can be done by EDIHs leveraging on existing regional partners such as EEN, Clusters and regional trade agencies.
  - Facilitate and encourage participation of SMEs and Start-ups in these joint events: joint stands/booths will increase outreach to, impact and attractiveness for SMEs.
  - Increased collaboration: potential co-organisers and participants of these joint events can include: EDIHs (representatives from local EDIH but from invited international EDIHs, thus creating corridors), EEN, Clusters and other relevant stakeholders such as regional trade agencies and start-up incubators, PSOs (including regional governments), other national or European initiatives (e.g. EIT KICs), Test and Experimentation Facilities-Data Spaces, and others including the general public
- Many EDIHs have already conducted in-depth ecosystem mapping, of both their regional/national and European ecosystem. Ecosystem mapping is in fact the first step when starting EDIH community/ecosystem development (see below). This will support the identification of current and setting up of future (regional and European) collaborations by way of identification of all relevant stakeholders for the EDIH. Also, it can identify suitable collaboration pathways and viable services for these collaborations. These mappings should explicitly include European collaboration partners whose services are supplied in English, i.e. are available beyond the own region.
- Community/ecosystem development:
  - Regional and national level: even though located in the same region, frequently organisations do not know each other and thus miss fruitful collaboration opportunities. Thus, there is the need to strengthen collaboration and networking

between regional/national partners in different domains to identify suitable collaborations, support and services between different partners and their customers, and EDIH are best positioned to mobilise and execute on the realization of such networks This could be done for instance by regular events, e.g. “EDIH-Fridays” where EDIH partners and customers meet on a specific topic and exchange in more informal environment, e.g. by using creative and participatory formats such as a World Cafe.

- European and international level: Develop approaches for collaborations with European EDIH ecosystems, including the identification of relevant EU partners/contacts and EDIH partners’ interested in intensifying and formalizing such collaboration ideally through Memorandum of Understanding. The first step to establish this kind of international collaboration is to approach partner EDIHs and to plan joint delegations or visits to get practical insights into each other’s test facilities, infrastructure etc. This represent the first cornerstone upon which more concrete collaborations, such as trans-regional matchmakings events (also in cooperation with other Networks), specific cooperations and mutual collaboration on topics of joint or complementary interests can be initiated.

Networking & Outreach activities:

- Via regular events/workshops, establish knowledge and working relations with other EU Networks and Initiatives sharing the EDIH services and strengthening networking, via e.g. Horizon Europe Mission Hubs, EIT KICs and Hubs (EIT Digital, EIT Health, EIT Manufacturing), Horizon Europe NCP Networks, International Networks and projects (e.g. Africa-Europe DIH supporting projects) and more. These events should be also brought to the attention of (regional/national) policy makers to inform them about the broad range of existing networks and initiatives, their approaches, services and goals and the benefits of networking these networks for the sake of multiplying outreach and SME support. Trans-regional or cross-border highlight events can also be organised to attract a large number of stakeholders, also beyond the region. These can be used to encourage a broad range of stakeholders, also Europe-wide to join and advertise among their customers. Good practices on these are already available from Germany, Czechia and other countries
- Open Innovation Challenges to facilitate collaboration between SMEs/start-ups and mid-caps/LEs both regionally and internationally. Information and good practices on the set-up and the implementation of these challenges is already available in different EDIHs, and should be leveraged to develop and disseminate the adoption of this type of activity.
- Hackathons & Startup Days. These can be implemented both regionally and transregionally (in English).
- Joint Stands/Visits/Delegations (both outgoing & incoming) for regional companies/PSOs. This is a prime opportunity to create benefits for customers and achieve outreach and visibility of the EDIH.
- Organization of co-creation workshops on approaches, benefits and practicalities to foster networking, cooperation and internationalization for companies & PSOs. During these meetings, stakeholders concretely identify and experience how collaborations

can be initiated and how they can best benefit from them. EDIH partners responsible for supporting European collaborations can then step in and further support stakeholders in concretely implementing the envisioned collaborations.

Brokerage, Matchmaking & Scouting:

- Organisation of matchmaking and brokerage events both jointly with conferences/fairs and stand-alone. These events can be open to international companies by co-organising the event together with EEN (co-organisation).
- Technology scouting services: needs assessment of SMEs and signposting to suitable collaboration partners, both within the region and trans-regionally. This is ideally done jointly with the regional EEN a priori.

All of these activities aim to identify and match companies/PSOs supply & demands via the network. As this is at the core of the EEN and cluster organizations/EFFRA as well, this will be an important opportunity for collaboration between the networks

4.2 EEN Service Offer

1) Partner Search Database
   - Partner Search Support manifested mainly through its Business, Technology and R&I collaboration Profile Database. Companies, with the support of their EEN advisor, can create a business offer or request, a technology offer or request and a Research and Development partner search profile and post it on the EEN database to find suitable collaboration partners. The platform can then be used from any interested network or individual to search via keywords for specific technology or service profiles that is suitable to satisfy the needs of other network's clients. After getting into contact with the EEN partner responsible a so-called Expression of Interest can be created.
2) Brokerage Events
   - Organisation of International Brokerage events & Company Missions in the framework of conferences, fairs and infodays (e.g.: Hannover Messe, MWC, Anuga, Posidonia, and others). Brokerage events can be shared with any interested networks and even be co-organised with other EU initiatives and projects, such as Cluster organisations, EDIHs, NCP networks, EIT KICs, or the EC.
3) Advanced Innovation support advisory services

   There is a large number of targeted innovation support advisory services supplied by the EEN consultants. Based on the EDIH specialisations, these services could also be utilized to consult EDIH customers in a targeted way.
   - Services such as Innovation, or Digitalisation maturity assessments, Access to finance, Sustainability support, IPR, Connection with Horizon NCPs and more.
   - The EEN network hosts a large number of Sector Groups so that collaboration and innovation support can be provided in a more focused and targeted way depending on the industry sector (e.g., Sector Group Digital, Electronics, Renewables, etc.) The EEN consultants involved in these Sector Groups have in-depth knowledge of "their" sector and can thus deliver targeted consultancy for companies active or interested in this specific sector.

A practical example of collaboration between the Networks from ACCIÓ

ACCIÓ, the Catalonia Trade & Investment Agency (Spanish EEN partner) together with their stakeholder MODACC - a textile and fashion cluster in Catalonia and Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Dutch EEN partner) have organised a company mission to the Netherlands to learn about good practices and technologies used to recycle textile waste which was held in September 2022. The delegation was formed by industrial textile SMEs and policymakers from Catalan municipalities aiming to learn from the best technological practices already implemented in the Netherlands concerning textile waste management and recycling. The Netherlands have developed advanced technologies and waste textile management processes as the implementation of the new EU Directive 2018/851 will enter into force in 2025 in Spain. Textile waste will need to be 100% recycled as cremation or textile will not be allowed anymore. In the Netherlands, the Directive entered into force in 2023. During this learning mission, participants met with peers to analyse how to improve the textile management process and know more about circular projects and advanced technologies in textile waste management. The visits included an advanced textile waste management plant, companies implementing chemical and mechanical recycling, meetings with associations managing circular projects that involve public and private sectors. One partnering agreement between a Dutch and a Spanish SME arose from the company mission.

***

The Audiovisual Cluster in Catalonia has over 200 members within the audiovisual industry. In 2022, ACCIÓ organised the Open Innovation Challenge B2B meetings event in the framework of the Integrated Systems Europe Congress (ISE) in Barcelona. The objective of the event was to work on open innovation initiatives launched by companies looking for innovative solutions eager to collaborate with technology providers. ACCIÓ worked together with the Audiovisual Cluster to identify which of its members were facing technology challenges. Among the SME and corporations which participated were Cellnex, a telecom broadcasting network, FilmIn, an over-the-top media service, CCMA, the main Catalan public broadcaster and Grupo Lavinia communications group. ACCIÓ was in charge of promoting the challenges and helping the companies select the most relevant technology providers and startups to solve their challenges. The meetings were held during the ISE congress in May 2022. ACCIÓ also works with the Audiovisual Cluster on the organisation of seminar on access to funding for Horizon Europe calls on cluster 2: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive society.

Box 4 A practical example of collaboration between the Networks from ACCIÓ

4.3 Cluster Service Offer

Clusters and their organisations can offer customized support services which are ultimately aimed at increasing the visibility of local SMEs and increasing their participation in regional, national and international partnerships and cooperation initiatives.

- Cluster organizations can conceptualize and provide customized information & engagement offer packages for interested companies in their specific fields of activity.
- Cluster organizations can provide, including on exceptional basis when relevant, the opportunity to participate in brokerage / matchmaking events and industry-related events organized at EU and regional levels.

- Using the broad and rich cooperation and partnerships networks, cluster organizations can ultimately facilitate sector-specific and targeted collaborations.

1) Support in accessing knowledge repositories, innovation portals, project databases, etc
   - Cluster organizations can provide general and/or preferential access to EDIHs and their beneficiary SMEs in using the EU and regional level knowledge repositories, Innovation Portals, digital libraries, mediatheques, projects info profile databases and other platforms and tools comprising relevant data, information, and knowledge in the specific fields of activity or on specific cutting-edge technologies the cluster organizations focus on. One of many eloquent examples in this context would be the EFFRA Innovation Portal - a repository of more than 1000 profiles of manufacturing innovation projects throughout the EU, funded from different sources, and available for the interested organizations active on this segment. The portal includes detailed presentation of projects' outputs and outcomes, demonstrators, KPIs, research results' exploitation in different areas, the implementing organizations; provides the possibility to do online searching for partners and matchmaking, dissemination of organizations' own initiatives in the area, and posting expressions of interest in partnerships and various collaboration initiatives, projects' ideas etc.
   - Cluster organizations and EDIHs can cross-disseminate on relevant activities, EU-funded and other relevant programmes, relevant open calls, collaboration interests, industry relevant initiatives, projects' results workshops etc. by involving one another in these efforts systematically.
2) Co-organization of events, bringing the relevant communities together
   - Co-organizing events together Clusters' multi-stakeholders' thematic and networking events can be, in particular in/for Widening Countries, a great opportunity tobring together different communities to discuss the developments, challenges, implemented and incurring policies agendas affecting the sectors, as well as to ensure a networking framework and mutual promotion of projects in the relevant areas and innovative technologies.
3) Involvement in the Policies- and R&I Programmes co-creation and consultation
   - Involving EDIHs and their beneficiaries in assessment, recommendations and consultations organized and rund by Clusters at regional and European level. This includes policies and European Framework Programmes consultations, as well as industry-related assessments and industry surveys. This surveys - oftern run by Clustesr in partnership with the European Commission – can also involve EDIHs and their ecosystem to ensure the inclusivity and equitable representation of the EDIHs Network.
   - Cluster organizations and EDIHs and their beneficiary SMEs can provide mutual support in drafting thematic notes or position papers on policies; contribution to advocating on EU level the needs of the private sector on relevant aspects.

4.4 Entry Points and good practices for successful collaboration

This section provides some practical examples of entry points to each network's services.

4.4.1 One client, different journeys: modelling shared approach to support SMEs and PSOs across Networks

This section aims at suggesting general approaches to ensure that each client (SME, startup, PSOs etc.) can Benefit from the wealth of services available in the different Networks regardless from its initial entry point. This “no-wrong-door” policy aims at generating the maximum added-value for the client, reducing any friction in the process.

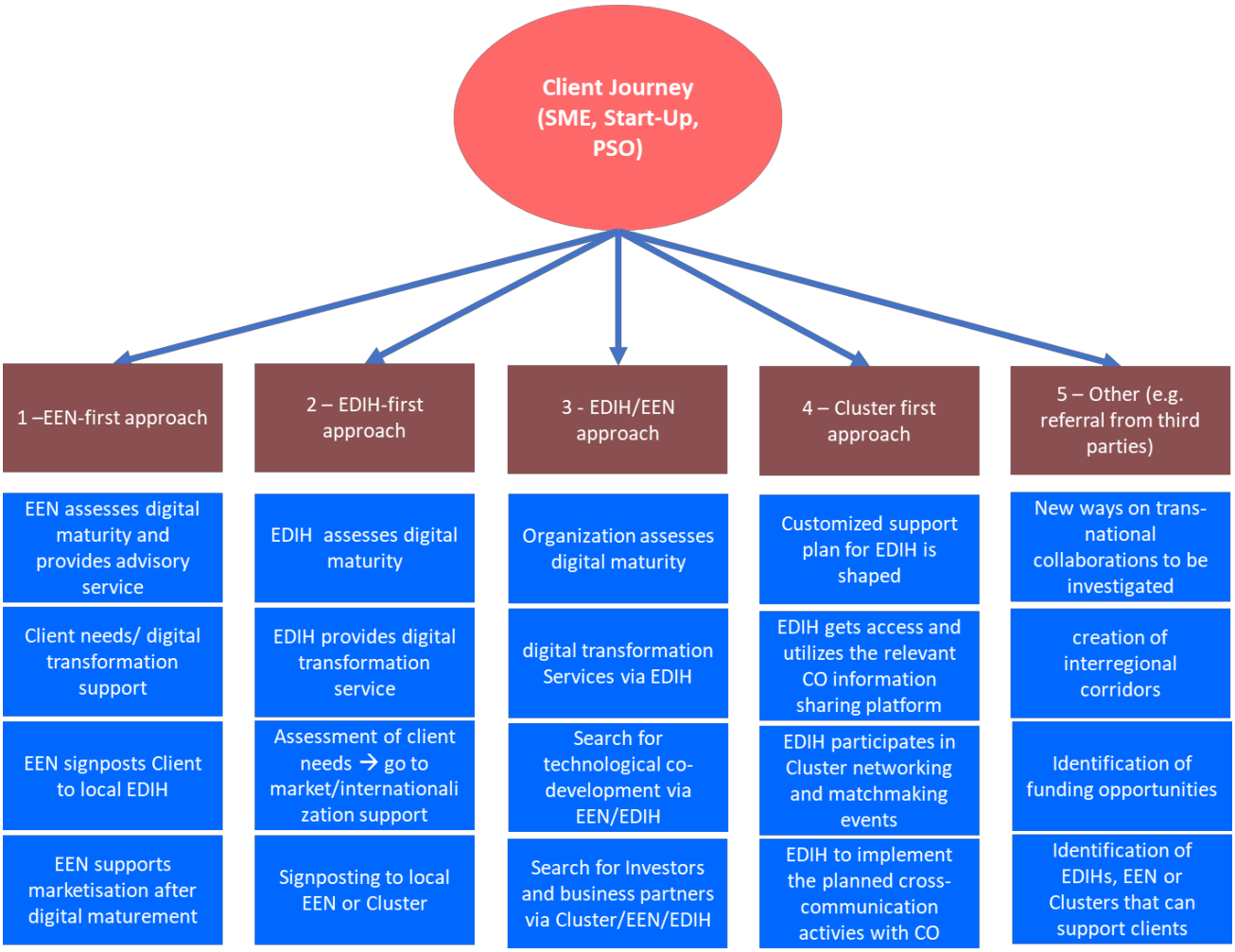


Figure 5 Client journey overview for innovation ecosystem and networking

4.4.2 EDIH – EEN entry points

The EEN Partner Search Database (PSD) can be used by EDIH-supported SMEs to find complementary technologies/services that will enhance their own solution maturement. SMEs can be guided by EDIHs and EEN in the identification of potential cross-border partners and reach international markets by disseminating their product or process solution via the EEN Network. If an EDIH is unable to serve a more traditional SME with relevant technology it can refer it to EEN to find a suitable technology- or solution-provider that answer the custom needs of such company

Joint cross-network events (at regional and international level) can facilitate deeper mutual understanding and better scope the services offered by each networks at regional and international level.

EDIH – EEN cross-border events – practical examples

1) With the aim to introduce their services together, the members of the Czech EDIH Network are regularly organising cross-border events designed to bring together the bordering national/regional EDIH ecosystems with the EEN partners in the bordering regions. As such, two first (Czech-Bavarian and Czech-Slovak) EDIH-EEN events under the common title of the series "**EDIH Twister**" have been organised so far, the other ones (Czech-eastern part of Germany, Czech-Polish and Czech-Austrian) are planned for the second half of 2023 and beginning of 2024.
2) Similarly, Baden-Württemberg and several French EEN partners jointly organise the AIxIA conference (Artificial Intelligence meets Intelligence Artificiel) which takes place in Baden-Württemberg one year and in France the other year. This event will be expanded to include all Baden-Württemberg and French EDIHs interested to join.
3) In February 2023, four EDIHs which at the same time are EEN nodes, organised an Artificial Intelligence best practices sharing, funding opportunities & B2B event. The goal was to showcase eight success stories where AI had been implemented successfully. In addition, advisors presented different European funding opportunities available at the moment. Finally, a virtual Brokerage Event was organised in order to be able to schedule meetings with the leading companies of these success stories and EDIH experts. The event was organized by 1) Spain - Catalonia (ACCIO): DIH4CAT, 2) Germany - Baden-Württemberg (FZI): EDIH AICS, 3) Netherlands - East Netherlands (OOST NL): BOOST ROBOTICS, 4) Slovenia - East Cohesion (University of Maribor): DIGI-SI. From this activity, a success story arose: A Catalan company was interested in the technology presented by a German company during the best practice sharing regarding energy optimization. They agreed to collaborate on a project and submitted a joint proposal for the Mind4machines cascade funding..

Box 5 EDIH - EEN cross-border cooperation examples

4.4.3 EDIH-Clusters entry points

Entry points for EDIH customers towards clusters and cluster organisations highly depend on the type of customer – and this might be quite different for cluster organisations than for EEN and EDIHs. Especially, for clusters/cluster organisations EDIHs can also represent a potential client, but these have different needs compared to industry clients. Thus, service delivery to EDIH/EEN clients via clusters might be more indirect.

- The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) is a well-functioning networking device for clusters. This can be used for information and outreach to clusters all over Europe by EDIHs but also other networks, e.g. to organise joint webinars promoted and run via the ECCP.
- Joint cross-network events (at regional and EU levels).
- Invite EDIHs to cluster-organised brokerage events on a regular basis.
- Cluster organizations can provide customized information & engagement offer packages for the interested EDIHs and companies in their specific fields of activity.
- Cluster organizations can provide general and/or preferential access to EDIHs and their beneficiary SMEs in using EU- and regional-level knowledge repositories.

4.5 Opportunities for Successful cooperation between the Networks

4.5.1 EDIH – EEN

1) Enhancement of information availability and sharing

All the networks should be in the position to clearly understand the technologies/testbeds/competences/services available across the networks – especially at local level where the services are likely going to be implemented. This can ensure a clear understanding of existing knowledge and possible gaps that can be effectively be covered by other EDIHs or networks (EEN/clusters).

A non-exhaustive list of collaboration areas between EEN and EDIHs includes:

- Knowledge transfer, exchange of experience and best practices
- Exchange of test bed infrastructure
- Mutual promotion of activities
- Exchange of clients (signposting) and mutual client support
- Design and delivery of training courses
- Fill the technology/service gap that can't be covered for by network-internal partners

To better enhance information availability and sharing, EDIHs and EEN can:

- Promote the portfolio of EEN Services among the EDIHs
- Promote the specific services and resources of EDIHs among the EEN network (e.g. supercomputers similar to the Research Infrastructures programmes such as MERYL, REACH or EOSC)
- Organisation of joint meetings/events in the different countries.
- Marketplace/matchmaking events to showcase available technological solutions, replicable technological approaches that have already been used to digitise companies in other countries, e.g. by way of Open Innovation Challenges and Brokerage events organised by the EEN within international congresses and trade shows (see also examples above).
- Joint partnering services for project applications.

4.5.2 Joint EDIH-EEN cross-border events, including brokerage/matchmaking and innovation challenges

1) **Organisation of Open Innovation Challenges and international B2B/matchmaking events** in the framework of renowned international events such as MWC, Smart City Expo World Congress, ISE and IoT Congress: The matchmaking activities organized by the EEN are an integral part of their strategic approach to establish a strong presence within specific sectors and fields. To achieve this, the EEN hosts its matchmaking events within the framework of international congresses and fairs. This participation in major events has resulted in higher international participation, enhancing the EEN recognition and visibility in the industry internationally The Open Innovation Challenges represent a new approach that focuses on the demand side, involving customized scouting of technology providers for SMEs to address corporations and large SME's technological challenges. Clusters and EENs organising these challenges invite other EEN partners and EDIHs to support their clients to participate in these events. At these events, companies from over 50 different countries participated and approximately 100 EEN partners areinvolved every year in co-organising the events.

An example of successful matchmaking: Arthur Holm

Personalised support on the partnering process increases the quality of the matching, therefore it also increases the probabilities to reach a partnering agreement. For example, a concrete impact on partnering with a digitalisation purpose has been achieved with the company **Arthur Holm/Albiral Display Solutions S.L**. The SME offers personalised, innovative and exclusive design technology for meeting and conference rooms for institutional, hospitality and educational applications as for example motorised cameras, retractable microphone solutions, etc. Arthur Holm wanted to digitalise its solution's portfolio. The EEN advisor supported Arthur Holm on its participation at the ISE Open Innovation Challenge in 2022 focused on the Audiovisual Industry with the aim of finding technology providers. The EEN advisor helped them define their challenge as well as to define the type of provider and collaboration sought that could suit them best. A profile were created and disseminated through the Network. We worked together with Arthur Holm on reviewing the different proposals received and selected the most relevant ones. The outcome was a complete agenda of meetings (15) to be held during the days of the event. Finally, Arthur Holm agreed on a collaboration with Marvut, one of the companies the EEN matched them with. They have developed together a virtual showroom environment to showcase Arthur Holm's products. Arthur Holm launched the virtual showroom solution during the ISE congress held in 2023.

Box 6 A succesfull Matchmaking - Arthur Holm

2) Organization of Technology Meetings with the regional EDIH in Catalonia (DIH4CAT) in the framework of the Advanced Factory Brokerage Event and the IoT Congress Brokerage Event events organised by the EEN. SMEs willing to explore an advanced technology or to develop innovative products based on advanced technologies could meet with technical experts from the EDIH which were invited to participate to the B2B meetings events. The technical expert meetings facilitate the identification of practices and technologies with high innovation potential for the SMEs. The meetings bring together experts from non-profit research and technology organisations and universities with companies and SMEs willing to innovate, to examine in-depth opportunities to promote the implementation of Industry 4.0 and IoT related technologies. The Technology Meetings were held before the launch of an important national call (PADIH) which funded "test before invest" projects. It provided a valuable opportunity for SMEs to learn about the regional EDIH and how to engage in a collaboration together.

EEN-EDIH client journey – two practical examples

1) EKT – National Documentation Centre Greece (EEN) and SmartAttica EDIH

The objective is to offer the SME a seamless provision of services between the two networks EEN and EDIHs. The line can be drawn the line between the access to basic digitalisation (EEN) and the access to advanced digital technologies and testbeds (EDIHs). EEN focuses on basic digitalization such as the organisation of matchmaking events or the digitalisation of the sales channels and online presence, furthermore it can provide access to a vast pool of digitalisation enabling companies and their solution offerings. While EDIH focuses on advisory and testing services to access advanced digital technologies. It should be pointed out that EEN and EDIHs services are complementary. EEN services cover a broad range of services in very diverse technological fields ranging from IPR strategy support, access to European funding (Horizon Europe, EIC Accelerator), sustainability assessment, connection with Horizon NCPs and more which enrich the client journey of the SME and the impact on its competitiveness in the long term.

In practical terms, the EEN advisor analyses the state of digital maturity of the organization to gain an initial understanding of their needs regarding advanced technology and how those needs (challenges, opportunities, innovation projects, etc.) could be addressed with the network's opportunities, funds, and services. Subsequently, the EEN advisor can direct the company to the EDIH to receive specialized in-depth service/support regarding the digitalisation process. In the following, the EEN advisor can identify digitalisation-enabling technological solutions offered via EEN's platform or identified through its various brokerage events and connect the owner/provider of the technological solution and the SME (the SME supported either by EEN or the EDIH) that is in need of such a technology. Finally, when the SME is matured after having received EDIH services, the EEN can be utilised to find business partners abroad and start sales. Such a value chain requires an interconnected ecosystem that is continuously communicating.

2) ACCIÓ EEN team and DIH4CAT EDIH

Another example of access points between the EEN and other networks is supplied by ACCIÓ. The ACCIÓ EEN team worked on an action plan together with the SME CITSALP. The SME has more than 30 years of experience in the commercialization of plastic raw material for the automotive industry. Since 2007 the company's main activity is on plastic scrap recycling.

First, a sustainability assessment was run using the CSN tool from Imp3rove to analyze the sustainability performance of the company. Energy efficiency and renewable energy sources were identified as improvement areas. CITSALP was advised to apply for a local Climate Change voucher to run a life cycle analysis of bumpers for vehicles made of recycled polypropylene. This study allowed the company to choose the material source and composition with the lowest environmental impact. A degradation study will also be performed to establish the number of times that the propylene material can be recycled and used in the production of bumpers. It was concluded that CITSALP could take advantage of its innovation management capacities if it could understand better how they work as an organization and how innovation project decisions were made. We decided to conduct an assessment of innovation management together with the company's C-level management.

Thanks to the expertise of the innovation management specialist, the company designed and implemented an innovative framework that encourages participation and collaboration within the entire management team. The innovation framework enabled them to prioritize the following projects: I) Define a manufacturing process to eliminate the remaining pigments from recycled plastics. II) Recuperation of plastic waste from other industries by purchasing a new machine. III) Plant digitalization: implementation of IoT (sensors) to automate the silos that contain recycled plastic. IV) Research project aimed at improving the quality control process. During the innovation assessment, the EEN advisor found out the company interest in adopting advanced technologies for the industry 4.0. Indeed, CITSALP was suggested to participate in the Tech Meetings event in the frame of IoT Solutions World Congress EEN Brokerage Event, where they could meet technology experts involved in the DIH4CAT (the regional EDIH). During the Tech Meetings EEN B2B event the company was able to meet EURECAT, the Advanced Manufacturing and Robotics expert of the DIH4CAT (EDIH), with whom they have applied for a technology testing project in the frame of the Next Generation funding

Box 7 EEN-EDIH Client Journey in Innovation Ecosystem and Networking - a practical examples

4.5.3 EDIH – Clusters

A multitude of cluster organizations exist, but there is the need to map and structure this significant volume of information so that it matches the interest and needs of EDIHs and their beneficiaries, and so that this information is available and navigable in a clear formatA catalogue which would map and regularly update the spectrum of active and relevant cluster organizations available for the EDIHs is a good way to overcome this challenge.. A good example for this is the is the ECCP mapping tool (https://reporting.clustercollaboration.eu/)
In addition, many cluster organizations are dealing with narrow sectorial dimensions or specific industries. EDIHs might need to approach different cluster organizations for various specific types of services.

4.5.4 Focus areas for an increased cooperation among the Networks

Based on what has been elaborated in the previous sections, a number of recommendations can be proposed to foster trans-network and trans-regional collaboration in Europe in the field of digitalization.

1) Make know-how of the networks searchable/findable and available to all network's clients to guarantee a seamless provision of services by the networks and easy access for clients.
   - Organise joint trans-network workshops and brokerage events during relevant events, conferences, fairs and infodays. (EC, EDIHs, EEN, Clusters can be co-organisers and support offices).
   - Tag EEN client profiles as "Digitalisation-Enabling" to help identify the most relevant profiles for EDIH-customers in a faster way.
   - Identify cluster services coherently and incorporate them into the EDIHs service offer covering different sets of needs, types of beneficiaries, sectors and segments of

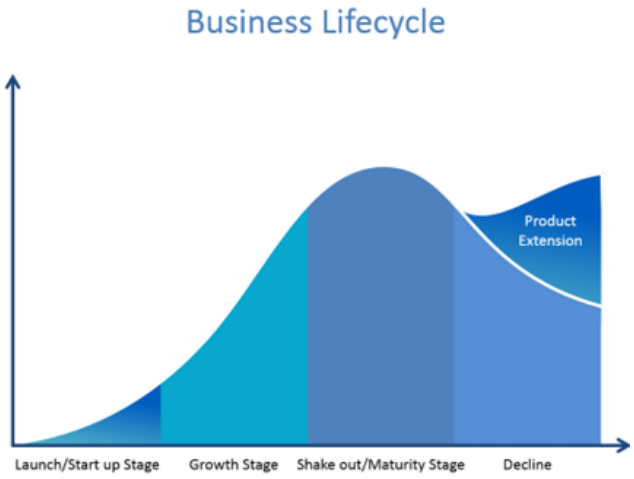
activity. ECCP Website offers a specific overview of each cluster services, that can serve as starting point for this.

- Increase efforts to identify and match companies'/PSOs' supply & demands via e.g. the EDIH network and make this information available to all networks in a structured and easily accessible way.
- Identify, map, and conceptualize services journey fiches, standard collaboration offers packs, cross-dissemination briefs/guides for all networks and even cross-network.
- Take advantage of the template Memorandum of Understanding available in Annex to facilitate collaboration

2) Utilize trans-regional proximity as a first important step to initiate European collaboration: as a first step, one could focus on creating a cross-border collaboration between EDIHs/EEN/clusters based on regional proximity and/or common language. An example is the close Czech and Slovak collaboration, but possible collaboration exists also in other areas such as Baltic countries, etc.

Conclusion

The overarching mission for the digitalisation challenge is to increase the number of SMEs integrating digitalisation to their business models and strategies, which would bring new business opportunities and result in bigger success on the market. To make it happen we therefore need to reform processes, to upgrade the intake, the understanding of information, the assessment of the client's digitalisations needs and potentials. All clients can be then served with services that match their business life cycle evolution or better that fit the different stages of a client growth journey.



Advisors from the different networks need to gather relevant information to understand well all the potential benefits of integrating means of information and communication technologies into business processes of client companies. The assessment should reveal the *openness* of a client company to new digital technologies as its digitalisation efforts are predetermined also by its *willingness* to accommodate them into their business processes.

Once a client is properly assessed, EDIHs, EEN partners and cluster organisations can put in place efficient client referral systems to best serve the SME clients' needs. Further to that, EDIHs, EEN partners and cluster organisations can plan and execute joint actions such as:

- the (co)organisation of awareness raising events and dedicated workshops (including also virtual formats) on digital technologies and their application in specific sectors;
- organising demonstration projects and providing information on potential technologies to be used;
- the (co)organisation of matchmaking events (including virtual formats) to facilitate cooperation on new digital technologies and their potential application to dedicated sectors, whereby matchmaking can take the form of B2B, B2EDIH, and C2C;
- the exchange of offers/request of cooperation profiles to give clients more opportunities find the right digital technology;
- the (co)organisation of joint investor-related events including hackathons and pitching preparation for SMEs;
- the development of internal and external capacities and capabilities for digital competencies including the (co)organisation of joint digital innovation audits/assessments of SMEs.

The members of the Joint Coordination Group, the European Commission and the DTA invite all EDIH, EEN partners and cluster organizations to read these guidelines to better understand how to foster cooperation and support mutual collaborative actions. The members of the Joint Coordination Group, the European Commission and the DTA hope that

these guidelines will prove useful in the daily work of the networks and bring benefit to the SMEs seeking digitalization support.
To deal with the possibility that some organizations are members of more than one network, a separate guidance document (annexed to these cooperation guidelines) has been prepared by the European Commission on how to best organize joint actions.

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Annexes

Annex I - Guidance for the Cooperation between the European Digital Innovation Hubs, Enterprise Europe Network Partners, Startup Europe Members and Cluster Organisations

GUIDANCE FOR THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUBS, ENTERPRISE EUROPE NETWORK PARTNERS, STARTUP EUROPE MEMBERS AND CLUSTER ORGANISATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) is the world's largest support network for small and medium sized enterprises. SMEs can receive a wide variety of services, ranging from access to finance to support for internationalisation. Industrial clusters are groups of specialised enterprises, often SMEs, and other related supporting actors in a location that cooperate closely. Many European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIH) will be based on existing clusters, or include organisations that are part of an EEN consortia. Startup Europe is the European Commission's initiative to connect high tech startups, scaleups, investors, accelerators and corporate networks. The SME Strategy also commits to expand Digital Innovation Hubs in connection with Startup Europe and the EEN and provide a seamless service within local and regional ecosystems. This document will provide guidance to proposers on how such a seamless service could be set up both between the EEN and EDIH and with Startup Europe and cluster organisations. There will be centrally organised collaboration between the different networks, and there will be specific collaborations between (groups of) EEN consortia, EDIHs, Startup members and clusters, who are geographically near each other or who find reason to work with each other to offer a seamless service to their customers.

2. CENTRAL COORDINATION BETWEEN THE NETWORKS THROUGH AN EU-LEVEL WORKING GROUP

To create as many synergies and structured exchanges as possible among the EDIH, EEN partners, Startup Europe members and industrial cluster organisations, a joint EU-level Working Group with equal number of representatives[1] from each participating network will be established. This Working Group will elaborate yearly plans with recommended actions to be implemented jointly by their members at regional/national level. The Working Group will hold two annual meetings which will also be used to monitor and plan joint actions, as well as to give a platform to exchange good practices of regional/national EDIH-EEN-cluster-Startup Europe cooperation.

The working group may also guide the organisation of EU-level events, which the four networks may benefit from, to facilitate community building and the dissemination of information. From the side of the EDIH, the Digital Transformation Accelerator would be supporting the organisation of these events.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE SPECIFIC COOPERATION AT LOCAL LEVEL

Regional/national specificities

At the local level, related EEN, EDIH, Startup Europe members and Clusters need to provide a seamless service to the SMEs. Possible activities where they could collaborate are:

[1] Each network will pre-select volunteering partners among their members to participate in this Working Group. The decision on the final set-up of the group will be taken jointly by DG CNECT, DG GROW and EISMEA, aiming for an appropriate geographical balance.

- the (co)organisation of awareness raising events and dedicated workshops (including also virtual formats) on digital technologies and their application in specific sectors;
- organising demonstration projects and providing information on potential technologies to be used;
- the (co)organisation of matchmaking events in particular among SMEs with a possibility to extend them to big businesses when relevant (including virtual formats) to facilitate cooperation on new digital technologies and their potential application to dedicated sectors;
- the exchange of offers/request of cooperation profiles to give clients more opportunities to find the right digital technology;
- the (co)organisation of joint investor-related events including hackathons, pitching events and pitching preparation for SMEs.

Client referrals - joint client journeys

Even though regional/national specificities are an essential requirement for concrete and effective joint actions, it is strongly recommended that cooperation partners put in place well elaborated client referral systems. These referrals should include loop-backs to those cooperation partners who initiated the client referral so as to make sure that joint client journeys can be subsequently managed the most effective way with the most relevant services offered to the client in question by the different cooperation partners.

The client referral should also be facilitated by the use of the results of the EU-level project "Collaborative mapping of innovation supporting actors"[2] which creates a common database with information and contact details of innovation supporting actors.

Regional/national cooperation agreements

Cooperation partners are recommended to sign regional/national cooperation agreements or Memoranda of Understanding that should outline their cooperation methods including planned joint actions which should be regularly reviewed.

a) Multiple memberships

One organisation might be a partner of the EEN, a member of Startup Europe, a cluster and/or an EDIH. This is possible as long as this organisation has the right capacity to carry out the services that are expected of these networks, and there is no double funding of the activities (see below). However, even if there is no overlap in partners a seamless collaboration is expected.

b) Financial aspects of the cooperation

No double funding

All throughout the operations of the different networks and their joint actions, double funding must be avoided.

[2] Collaborative mapping of Innovation supporting actors (europa.eu)

Project teams – work programmes - accounts

Every cooperation partner belongs to one of the participating networks and for that purpose it will have its own 'home base' in an EEN/EDIH/cluster/Startup Europe (project) team. These teams are – through their participations in the different networks – assigned separate project budgets with corresponding work programmes.

In case of multiple memberships, different project teams (e.g. EEN and EDIH) might exist under the same 'roof'. However, even in these cases the different project teams are assigned to their specific projects and specific project-related tasks with corresponding budgets that are derived from the corresponding work programmes.

Who incurs the costs 'pays'

As a common principle, those cooperating partners who incur costs for the implementation of any joint action will need to 'pay': this means that the incurred costs will need to be booked onto the accounts of the network project they represent[3].

There might be joint actions that give rise to different cost items being incurred by all involved cooperating partners. In these cases and before the implementation of any joint action, a common agreement should be achieved as to the operational and financial role of all involved cooperating partners.

c) Next steps

DG CNECT, DG GROW and EISMEA will launch their selection procedures to identify the future members for the Joint Working Group that will guide the overall cooperation as referred to at the beginning of this note. The first meeting of the Joint Working Group is envisaged for September 2022.

In the meantime and while the EDIHs are being rolled out, preparatory works for joint actions can already be undertaken. Therefore, first exchanges at regional/national level among the cooperation partners are strongly encouraged with the objective to better understand each other's expertise and service range as a prerequisite to map out common joint actions in the future.

[3] E.g. if all the costs of a B2B event are incurred by EEN partners, these costs will have to be booked on the EEN project and cannot be booked on the EDIH project.

Annex II – Template MoU between EEN, Cluster Organisations and EDIH

DISCLAIMER: The following template is provided as reference only and can be used, reused and adapted to the form it may fit its users better. The following template is intended as guidance only

Memorandum of Understanding

BETWEEN

Enterprise Europe Network (EEN)

And

Cluster organisation

and

The European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) consortium

Hereinafter individually referred to as “Part” and collectively as “Parties”.

Preamble

EEN (Name of the consortia) + short presentation…

Cluster (Name of the cluster) + short presentation…

EDIH (Name + short presentation)

EDIH is a one-stop shop for industrial companies in their digital transition by offering them support and new services.

EDIH offers an innovative and value-added approach based on the delivery of services in the form of integrated courses. Two thematic paths have been designed in line with industrial needs: 1) From data to Artificial Intelligence for business management; 2) Digitization of business processes and production towards the digital twin.

In addition to these advanced services, and in order to meet the needs of SMEs far from digitalisation, entry-level services (awareness, DMA and basic services) are also offered.

1. Purpose of this memorandum of understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) expresses the intention of all Parties to define and collaborate in a common line of action, in order to maximize synergies and avoid duplication of activities carried out by each Party. It specifies possible joint activities and means of interaction to foster smooth and mutually beneficial cooperation, ultimately leading to better services to end customers of both Parties.

All Parties are (co-)funded by the European Commission and their cooperation can offer added value and more efficient support to their customers, especially SMEs, also generating satisfaction for network collaborators..

All Parties intend to specify a list of joint activities and coordinate their respective activities.

2. The Parties The Parties are:

- [Name] coordinator of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) consortium [Name of consortium]
- [Name] representative of the Cluster Organisation [Name of Cluster]
- The [Name]coordinator of the EDIH project, acting in the name and on behalf of the EDIH consortium.

Each Party shall designate, according to its own terms, at least one natural person responsible for being the privileged point of contact for the execution of this agreement. It will keep the other informed without delay of any modification.

3. Potential areas of cooperation

EDIHs, and EEN and Cluster organisations can serve client SMEs with the provision of complementary services. A lot of cooperation opportunities beneficial to clients – especially SMEs - can be identified between both network at local / national / European levels.

Cooperation opportunities between the Parties may include – but are by no means limited to:

- Information sharing and mutual signposting including participation in each other's meetings.
- Signposting of SMEs requiring digitalisation services to the EDIH by the EEN advisors after a first initial needs assessment.
- Signposting of SMEs requiring single market and internationalisation services that turn to EDIH to the EEN (EU regulations, innovation management, market analysis, access to funding, …)
- Exchange of technological partnering offers and requests.
- Joint organisation or participation in events for partnering, training or information purposes.
- Joint awareness-raising/promotion of events related to the digitalisation of the European Industry
- Cross participation to the EEN Digitalisation Thematic Group and the joint EEN – EDIH high-level working group

Information will be shared on a regular basis or in appropriate cases when there is potential synergy. The main outcome will be transferred to both networks using the mailing lists / communication tools of each network. If and when necessary, information from one network will be uploaded on the web pages of the other initiative, to the extent permitted by law and under existing legal arrangements between the members of the networks.

4. Costs of the joint activities

Unless otherwise agreed in writing by both Parties, each Party will bear its own costs to participate in joint activities and support the intended cooperation incurred during the term and in connection with this MoU (information exchange, dissemination, informal liaising etc).

5. Administration Matters

This MoU will be valid until (specify date).

This MoU will be terminated in one of the following cases:

- Upon expiry of this MoUS
- When either one of the EEN or EDIH project is terminated
- When one Party gives notice of termination to the other within at least one month's notice.

6. General

1. Notwithstanding any other provision or clause in the present MoU, the signature of this MoU can in no way be construed as an obligation to engage into certain activities or projects with legally binding commitments, or as a restriction for the Parties in their activities in any other way.
2. All the parties will act following their contracts.
3. In principle, Parties will not exchange confidential information in the context of the MoU. If the Parties want to exchange certain confidential information for specific purposes, they will have to enter into a specific non-disclosure agreement.
4. The existence of the present MoU and the content thereof will not be considered as confidential information. However, each communication by either Party that will refer to the other Party will be subject to the prior approval of the latter.
5. The members of the Parties shall under no circumstance incur joint liability under this MoU.

The signature of a Party by means of a scan or digitization of the original signature (e.g. a scan in PDF format) or an electronic signature (e.g. via DocuSign), counts as an original signature with the same validity, enforceability and permissibility. Each Party receives a fully signed copy of the MoU. The transfer of this copy by e-mail or via an electronic signature system will have the same legal force and legal effect as the transfer of the original copy of the MoU.

For Part I, the coordinator	For Part II, the coordinator	(if necessary) For Part III, the coordinator

For Part, the coordinator

First name, NAME

Status of signatory

Date:

For EDIH, the Coordinator

First name, NAME

Status of signatory

Date:

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